

Tests

8 cm TVs

DMA MOBILE PHONES

IDE-BY-SIDE FRIDGES

BATHROOM CLEANERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

SUN SAFETY



More than just
sunscreen

ECHINACEA

Cure-all or rip-off?

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Best Buys update

COMING SOON IN CHOICE



PORTABLE FRIDGES
SPARKLING WINE
DVD PLAYERS
CREDIT CARDS
DISHWASHER DETERGENTS

this month online

www.choiceextra.com.au

This is the free website exclusive to CHOICE personal subscribers. Look out for this symbol  in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info online.



Fridges

Need a new fridge to help cope with the summer workload? This month for CHOICE subscribers our Compare-a-fridge database is all yours free of charge. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Nov 03 under 'fridges' in the A-Z index.

www.choice.com.au

CHOICE's public website, including content from *Computer CHOICE*, 'compare-a-product' features and news on consumer issues and our public campaigns.



Overdrive!

Enter our fun competition where we run a clothes dryer till it breaks. If you predict when, the prize is \$1000. And you can vote for which unusual items we add to the dryer each week. Starts November 3 — go to www.choice.com.au.

Personal CHOICE subscribers can have a discounted membership to www.choice.com.au for just \$7.50 per quarter (see page 50). If you currently have free access for 12 months, this will continue until that time is up, after which the discounted subscription will be available.



Time to get serious about smoking

It's been 42 years since CHOICE first ran a major article on arguably the most dangerous consumer product of all:

tobacco. Since then, Australian smoking rates have fallen dramatically, all but the last vestiges of advertising have been banned, Australian smokers pay among the highest prices in the world, and the social acceptability of smoking around others has never had worse press.

For all this, though, one in five adults and one in four teenagers still smoke every day. At around 19,000 each year, smoking kills more Australians than breast, skin and cervical cancers, AIDS, road deaths and other injuries, suicide and murder combined.

Just as mosquitoes spread malaria, the tobacco industry is the main carrier of lung cancer — a rare disease at the turn of last century, and one that's uncommon in non-smokers. For all the rhetoric, no Australian government has ever got serious about controlling the industry. Cigarettes are sold alongside confectionery, and companies can add whatever ingredients they like to the tobacco mixture, including highly addictive nicotine analogues, using the 'secret formula' defence.

Unlike US governments, the Australian government has been too cosy with the industry to sue it for the public cost of treating tobacco-caused disease. Both major parties — but not the Democrats or Greens — take political donations from the industry.

Serious tobacco control will involve serious product regulation appropriate to the harm tobacco causes in our community. Future generations will surely be amazed that governments were so slow to act.

Simon Chapman

Simon is professor of public health at the University of Sydney and a life member and former chair of the Consumers' Association. His website (<http://tobacco.health.usyd.edu.au>) has many research papers on revelations found in the tobacco industry's internal documents.



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Photo: Getty Images

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Medibank Private does it again

Last year it discontinued one of its better-value products, First Choice Saver, forcing consumers to pay more. This year it's removed the highest excess option (level 3) on Blue Ribbon Hospital and Smart Choice Hospital policies, transferring customers to a lower excess option — and thereby substantially raising their premiums. Policyholders were given about 60 days to contact the fund. If they didn't, they'd automatically find themselves paying a much higher premium.

Retirees Pat and Fred Fahey's total premium went up by a whopping \$321 a year. Says Fred: "In 2001 we paid \$672, currently \$784. In November it'll be \$1105. Our income has in no way matched this increase. And we tried to be responsible for our own welfare, with very modest call on benefits."

MEDIBANK PRIVATE says 75,000 memberships are involved in this year's switches.

CHOICE thinks **MEDIBANK PRIVATE** is playing a nasty trick on consumers. Members bought the original policies believing they represented reasonable value, with the justifiable expectation that this value, relative to other policies, would continue. Some people have told CHOICE they now feel their faith in **MEDIBANK PRIVATE** was misplaced. Health funds know customers almost always stick with the fund they originally signed up with, even though its value, compared with other funds' products, may decline.



Sections of the industry have been accused in the past of 'loss leading' — making promises and offering apparently good-value policies to sign up new customers, then changing conditions and reducing value a little while later.

MEDIBANK spokesman Simon Westaway denied this, saying the products were longstanding but had become unsustainable. "Medibank does not loss lead," he said. "This is an absolutely regrettable decision but for the long-term good of the fund we have to make tough decisions."

"I can understand the angst. We'll most likely lose members from this, and we don't want to lose members."

Sun exposure and multiple sclerosis



After decades of demonising the sun because of the risk of skin cancer, concerns are now being raised that too little exposure could also be detrimental. Previous issues of *CHOICE Health Reader* have reported on women who get too little sun being at increased risk of osteoporosis and some forms of cancer. Now October's *Health Reader* reports on a recent Australian study that's found a link between the sun and multiple sclerosis (MS).

The researchers questioned Tasmanians with and without MS and found that greater exposure to sun during childhood and early adolescence was associated with a 70% decrease in the risk of MS.

This is consistent with studies that have shown that the further you live from the equator, the more likely you are to develop MS — and Tasmania has the highest incidence in Australia. However, whether it's due to less sun (particularly in winter), as this study suggests, other environmental factors (increased

exposure to viruses in colder climates) or genetics is still a topic of debate.

In any case, medical experts are now saying we should get *some* sun exposure. However, this doesn't mean you can head to the beach and bake your brains out — moderation is the key. As our article on sunscreens in this issue (page 15) notes, for most people 10 minutes in the sun before 10 am should be adequate; the advice is still to stay out of the sun between 10 am and 3 pm when it's at its strongest if possible.

Also in this issue of *Health Reader*: ■ Researchers studied nearly 500 people over 75 and compared the leisure activities of those who developed dementia and those who didn't. Even allowing for educational level and illnesses, they found those who read, played board games, played musical instruments or danced had a lower risk of dementia. So, use it or lose it!

If you'd like to subscribe to *CHOICE Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 or go to www.choice.com.au.

ACA'S CEO FAREWELLED

As some subscribers may be aware from media reports, after 14 years at the Consumers' Association our Chief Executive Officer, Louise Sylvan, took up the position of Deputy Chair of the ACCC from November 1. This appointment is an important win for consumers and the association wishes her well in her new position.

ACA's Council has advertised for a replacement and expects to make an appointment by the end of November.

CORRECTION

WASHING MACHINES

CHOICE, September 2003

In the table on pages 46–47 we said the ASKO Quattro W6231 and W6021 both have a delayed start feature. In fact, while the W6231 does have it, the W6021 doesn't.

CAN YOU HELP?

PROBLEMS WITH RENTAL CARS

Have you had any problems with a rented or courtesy car in Australia? For example, you had an accident and found you weren't covered, or the company charged you credit card without your agreement. If so, we'd like to hear about your experience for an article we're currently researching.

Please tell us:

- What was the problem?
- Did you try to resolve the problem with the car rental company or complain to another body, such as your state's fair trading/consumer affairs department?

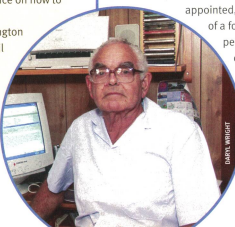
What was the outcome?

What's the name of the company

involved?

Do you have any tips for other consumers on car hire in general or any advice on how to avoid problems?

Write to Rental Cars, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email rentalcars@choice.com.au by November 15, 2003. Please include a daytime phone number so we can contact you if we have any questions. Thanks for your help.



EXERCISE BIKE INJURY RISK

Exercise bikes can pose a serious injury risk for young children, according to recent Monash University research.

Between 1995 and 2000, at least 140 exercise-bike-related injuries were treated in Victorian hospital emergency departments. The most serious of these required amputations or partial amputations of 11 young children's fingers and toes. Other injuries included fractures, sprains and open and superficial wounds.

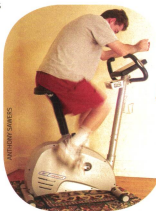
Research associate Belinda Clark said children under four were the most vulnerable group for these types of injury. "The most common event seems to involve young children

putting their fingers into the wheel spokes while another person is riding the bike," she said.

Current safety standards have been

in place since 1993 and are mandatory. They require securely fastened frames around all moving parts and well constructed seats, supports and handlebars (as in the photo on the left). But the use and private sale of older-style exercise bikes can't really be regulated.

So if you buy an exercise bike secondhand, make sure it conforms to the mandatory safety standards and none of the protective guards has been removed. And never leave one accessible to young children.



Deceased estate hoax

An alert subscriber, Mike Burton of Mackay, Queensland, forwarded us an email claiming to come from a company called Deceased Estate, based in Sydney. It said the recipient had been nominated as the next of kin in the will of a distant relative, and asked him to contact their office. The name of the 'distant relative' wasn't provided.

Mike smelt a rat, and when we rang the phone number to check it out, we spoke to an exasperated receptionist at an unrelated company, who explained it was a hoax and said they'd received "millions" of calls.

While harmless enough (except for the poor receptionist), receiving this sort of email might be enough to raise people's hopes of a windfall, even if only for a short time, and it's pretty cruel.

So how do you know whether an approach such as this is legitimate? An executor of an estate can be a relative or friend nominated by the deceased person in their will, or administrators may be appointed if no executor is nominated. This may be a solicitor, the Public Trustee or a private trustee company.

In the case of an executor, chances are you'll know them, or else they'll know the deceased person well enough for you to check their credentials. If an administrator is appointed, however, the Public Trustee says you'd normally be notified by way of a formal letter, which would also include the name of the deceased person. Being contacted by phone or receiving notification in the form of an email that doesn't even name the deceased is grounds for suspicion.

CHOICE Books publishes *What to do when someone dies*, which provides practical information in a step-by-step guide. You can buy it directly from CHOICE for \$18 by going to www.choice.com.au/shop or phoning 1800 069 552 (quote code WTDD).

F&P: CAUGHT OUT ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

FISHER & PAYKEL appliances generally do well in our tests. And in our past reliability surveys they haven't rated too badly either — around average or slightly below for 'not needing repair', and towards the top for 'would buy the same brand again'. So how come so many of you have had problems in recent years with your F&P fridge, washing machine or dishwasher, or with the company's customer service in general?

Over the past couple of years (for which we don't yet have new reliability data), we've received many more complaints about F&P appliances than for any other whitegoods brand — bearing in mind, of course, that F&P is a single brand covering a number of product categories that sell millions of appliances, but also that these are only the complaints that people have passed on to us. The particular technical problems sent to us are:

■ **Fridges** (13 complaints): Cracked plastic shelves and crispers, doors falling off, high noise level, freezing crispers/poor temperature performance, faulty seals, leaking water and gas. (The problem with the fridge door falling off has been addressed now — see CHOICE, October 2003, for F&P's recall of certain fridges where faulty bottom hinge brackets could cause this problem.)

■ **Washing machines** (14 complaints): Faulty circuit boards, lid switches, water pumps, balance switches, bearings, linting and solenoid problems.

■ **Dishwashers** (five complaints): Problematic filtration, switch failures, the length of the drain hose and problems with the machine turning itself on and then getting stuck in the cycle.

A common problem many of you experienced when your F&P appliance went on the blink was the high cost and availability of parts, and the level and high cost of service. For example, one reader wrote to us "in absolute disgust" when hearing they'd have to spend yet another half day at home waiting for a washing machine repairer — they'd just done that the day before, but the 'fixed' machine still didn't work.

Another family with two children under five were told they were 28th in the queue for a replacement electronic board, which meant a three to four-week wait without a washing machine. Or the customer who was told her dishwasher couldn't be repaired at her home and she'd have to have it unplumbed and taken to the service centre across the city. All in all, a not too flattering scorecard for F&P.

We sent detailed extracts of your complaints to F&P Australia and gave the company a chance to comment, but its initial response from the marketing manager failed to address any of the problems raised. Instead we got the 'marketing speak': that its customer service model was "one of the most comprehensive



ANTHONY SAMMES

and sophisticated of any in the country", that it had allocated significant resources over the past two years to improve it, and that its service technicians achieved a "first-time fix" in over 93% of cases.

F&P said it takes customer service very seriously, but we think the number of dissatisfied customers who've contacted us is simply too large to be brushed off. That 7% or so of problems that aren't fixed "first time" represents a lot of annoyed people, given the company's sales volume. So we consulted the company again and this time asked the service manager what specifically customers can do if they get the runaround from call centre staff or technicians. Here's what to do:

■ If the normal process through F&P's customer care centre (phone 1300 650 590) is unsatisfactory, ask for a customer care manager or, if that doesn't work out, for someone in customer relations. Staff there are authorised to resolve the situation.

■ If your problem can't be resolved over the phone, send an email to customer@fp.com.au.

■ If you still can't get a satisfactory outcome, write to the General Manager, Service, at Fisher & Paykel Customer Services, Private Bag 7, Silverwater DC NSW 1811.

F&P emphasised that it wants all owners of F&P appliances (old and new) to think of F&P as the first people to contact when problems arise. For this to happen it'll need to provide good service that people are satisfied with. While we trust our discussions with F&P may help reduce the incidence of poor service, follow the guidelines given above if you do have a problem, and let CHOICE know too.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

Congratulations to Sally Cherry of Rosewood, Queensland, the winner of our September label carrier promotion. She's won \$200 worth of CHOICE books.

your letters

Spoilsport

I felt your story about the calcium-enriched ice cream was a bit negative. It's great to see a food manufacturer trying to do better and offer more nutritional value rather than less, which seems to be so often the case.

While ice cream can never be considered anything other than a treat, all kids love it. Not every child likes to drink milk or eat yoghurt or cheese and, let's face it, a lot of adults also fall short in their own calcium intake, but very few will turn down a bowl of ice cream.

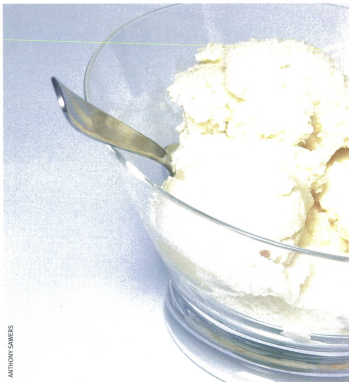
My two children eat little in the way of calcium-rich foods and I'm always trying to find new ways to increase the amount of calcium in their diet. When a food that they eat already is made available with significantly more calcium in it, I know which product I'll buy. I say thanks to **BLUE RIBBON** and hope the product is supported so it stays on the supermarket shelves.

Alison Dawes
Kingston Beach, Tas

In defence of certain bank fees

Recently I travelled in Europe. Instead of carrying large sums of cash I made regular but relatively small withdrawals from ATMs. In total, these ATM transactions cost me 1% of the sum involved in fees.

I regard this expense as a reasonable insurance cost



ANTHONY SAMES

against loss by theft. My wife had an earlier experience of money stolen from a bag. The use of travellers' cheques involves a similar commission charge and the added difficulty these days of finding someone prepared to give full value.

Not all the stories about bank fees need to reflect negatively on the banks. There's an element of making the system work for the customer's benefit.

Dr RW Gibson
Barwon Heads, Vic

Transaction fees like these vary depending on the bank and the account. If you want to get money

from overseas ATMs, check with your bank before you leave which card you can use at your destination and which incurs the lowest fees.

Waiving your rights

My 19-year-old daughter races go-karts with aspirations of a motor sport career. This year with her licence renewal she received a waiver to sign, which consisted of six points stating in various wording that if the association is negligent in any way, you will not sue. (The Australian Karting Association NSW issues the licence on behalf of the national body of the AKA.)

THUMBS UP!



Jodie Kable-Corbett
had her Sunbeam

mixmaster — a wedding present — in storage for several years, after which she discovered it didn't work. Sunbeam fixed it free of charge, even though it had exceeded its warranty period and she had no receipt.

■ "If only other products and companies were this good," writes Jane Rowland, via internet, commenting on **Wüsthof** knives and **Cookaholics** in Burnside, WA. She bought several knives 20 years ago from a shop long since defunct. Cookaholics passed on the two that had broken to the manufacturer's agent and within a few days she received two new knives. "A lifetime guarantee that meant exactly that!"

We're more than aware of the danger in racing or, for that matter, in taking part in any sport. These waivers, while legally cloudy, are morally wrong. A young girl was killed in our sport last year and rather than tightening up safety, etc, this waiver has come out. Basically, if someone wants to race, they have to have a licence, and to get a licence they must sign this waiver. You have no choice other than to drop your sport.

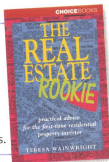
My daughter is lucky that we found the Queensland body of karting agreed with us and refused to ask its drivers to sign the waiver. How this affects the insurance, only time will tell. My daughter's become a Queensland resident to enable her to race without signing the waiver — an extreme measure that she shouldn't have had to take.

Yvonne Veivers
Via internet

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the "Letter of the month". This month's winner, Dr RW Gibson, receives *The Real Estate Rookie*, or any other book of his choice from the book catalogue you received with this issue.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



Echinacea

— POWER PILL OR PLACEBO?

It's a popular herbal supplement, but how strongly does medical science support its use? And is taking it in a tablet likely to be any use?

IN A NUTSHELL

I The evidence that echinacea is effective is mixed: some studies have shown it to stimulate the immune system and help prevent or alleviate colds, but others have failed to show any benefit.

I Our active ingredients analysis of 10 popular echinacea tablets shows that they may not contain enough to do any good even if you're an optimist about echinacea's effectiveness.

Echinacea is a popular herbal medicine, but does it really live up to the claims made for it?

Examples of claims we found on echinacea products included: "Can assist in maintaining a healthy immune system", "Relief of the symptoms of coughs, catarrh, colds and influenza; relief of symptoms from allergies and hay fever" and "Aids in the management of minor skin disorders such as acne, assists in the healing of mild skin infections and relieves the symptoms of eczema".

Some products we found took a more cautious line: "Aids general wellbeing" was the only claim made for one product.

To try to find out the real story about the benefits or otherwise of taking echinacea, we reviewed the latest medical evidence and consulted experts from both western medicine and complementary therapy.

We also bought 10 top-selling products and subjected them to analytical scrutiny in the lab for chemical quality markers and chemicals thought to be among echinacea's active ingredients.

AN IMMUNE SYSTEM BOOSTER?

This is one of the most common benefits claimed for echinacea and probably represents the underlying rationale for its spectrum of claimed health benefits: by 'boosting' the immune system is there anything you couldn't cure or alleviate?

A lot of the evidence comes from test-tube studies and tests on animals. Some of these show that echinacea increases the numbers of certain types of blood cell that fight infection. It's also been shown to cause blood cells to release chemical messages



PHOTOLIBRARY



that stimulate other cells to fight infections. And another documented effect is the conversion of certain types of blood cell into 'gobblers' — large lumpy immune cells that literally swallow up and destroy invading pathogens, toxins and foreign material.

It sounds promising, but do these lab results translate into immune system effects in humans?

Clear conclusions are difficult to draw — about half of the reported peer-reviewed clinical trials in people show a stimulatory effect and half don't.

The most recent trial on echinacea's effects on the immune system was published last year, and looked for an increase in the number of 'gobbler' cells as well as associated cellular chemical messages in healthy men aged 20–40. No differences in these immune system parameters were found between groups of men taking freshly squeezed juice of the herb or a placebo juice.

However, two other clinical trials showed immune system stimulation when liquid echinacea extracts were given orally or by injection.

But as one scientist put it, "Whether these effects are associated with desired health outcomes — such as reduced incidence, severity or duration of illness — is perhaps a more important question."

A TREATMENT FOR COLDS?

Echinacea's prime claim to fame is a reputed ability to fight the common cold — both in terms of preventing it and in alleviating its symptoms and duration — and most clinical trials have focused on this.

More than half of these have shown that echinacea can reduce the **symptoms and duration** of a cold, at least to a modest degree. For example, one trial showed that the duration of colds was reduced from an average 4.4 days to 3.4 days when volunteers took echinacea tablets. And drum roll, please — those taking echinacea used only 882 tissues between them compared to 1168 used by those taking a placebo.

Scientists therefore think some echinacea products might be effective at reducing the effects of a cold. However, there's still not enough evidence to recommend specific echinacea preparations.

On the negative side, the most recent clinical trial (reported last year), recruited 148 US college students and gave half of them capsules containing a mixture of two echinacea species (*Echinacea purpurea* and *Echinacea angustifolia*), which are also commonly sold in Australia. Compared to students who received a placebo, those who took echinacea showed no reduction in the duration of cold symptoms.

The authors of the study concluded that the use of echinacea is unlikely to be beneficial in young and generally healthy patients. However, they pointed out that their study should not be the last word on echinacea.

Some examples of clinical trials showing positive **preventive** results include a 1998 study in which people taking plant extracts of *E purpurea* and *E angustifolia* had an incidence of colds of 29% and 32% respectively, compared to a 37% incidence of colds in those taking a placebo, when given over a three-month period.

However, other clinical trials reporting no benefit in taking echinacea to prevent the common cold were published in 1999 and 2000.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a part of the National Institutes of Health in the US, has funded a comprehensive clinical trial due to report early next year. This trial will assess the effectiveness of various echinacea preparations on the common cold. Importantly, it will also evaluate the health benefits associated with particular chemically defined echinacea extracts.

ONLY WORKS SOME OF THE TIME?

Why is it that clinical trials of echinacea seem to vary so much — benefits are shown in some trials but none in others?

The way in which clinical trials are organised and the key results measured and interpreted are important factors that determine a trial's outcomes. But with herbal medicines, another reason may be that doses of active ingredients can vary from study to study, depending on how the herbal product is prepared and/or used.

And echinacea products are known to vary in quality depending on how they're grown and processed. Studies have even shown climatic conditions change the amount of chemicals that give echinacea its purported health benefits. On top of that, it's unlikely that all of echinacea's active ingredients have been identified.

Additionally, the majority of the clinical data on echinacea has been obtained without the known active chemicals being analysed. This means that in

most trials the dose of active ingredients is unknown — which doesn't make it easy to compare the results of one trial with another.

This is in contrast to how western medicines are clinically trialled, where the dose of a sole active ingredient is known precisely. This makes comparison of trial data much easier, differences in trial design aside.

AND IS IT SAFE?

It's recommended that you don't take echinacea longer than eight weeks at a time. This is because it's thought that long-term use of the herb may in fact depress the immune system. Although this concern is mainly theoretical, some evidence to support it is emerging.

The World Health Organization and authorities in Germany have cautioned against the use of echinacea by people with various autoimmune diseases like lupus and multiple sclerosis or chronic conditions like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

An eminent immunologist we spoke to confirmed this caution, saying echinacea "could theoretically make these conditions worse". But, he added, "The low amount of echinacea used in many products makes them harmless." See *Low levels of active ingredients?*, right, for what our tests found in this respect.

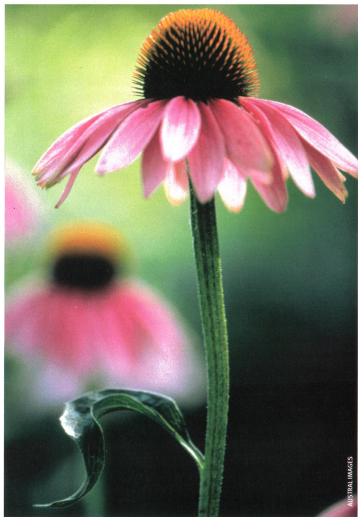
We'd suggest that if you have any chronic health problem, talk to your doctor before taking echinacea.

Is echinacea safe for expectant mothers? A recent study seems to suggest so. It looked at the numbers of minor and major foetal malformations occurring in two groups of pregnant women, one of which had taken echinacea. No difference was found in the number of abnormalities between the two groups of mothers. However, if you're pregnant or think you might be, it's probably still a good idea to talk to your doctor before taking echinacea (or any alternative therapy).

It's also been reported that some people may be allergic to echinacea. Those with an allergy to any member of the *Asteraceae* (daisy) family should avoid it.

A recent Australian study assessed the numbers of reports to the Australian Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee (ADRAC). The authors found that of 483 adverse drug reports, over 10% involved echinacea, and 26 of these appeared allergic. Reactions to echinacea included acute asthma attacks, rashes, throat swelling and even life-threatening anaphylaxis (toxic shock).

Fortunately, potentially serious reactions of this kind are rare, and while echinacea's effectiveness is still in question, it's at least thought to be a relatively safe herb for most people when taken short-term.



Low levels of active ingredients?

When the not-for-profit US organisation, ConsumerLab, tested echinacea products on sale in the US in 2000, it found that four out of 19 (21%) didn't meet their labelled level of echinacea-specific 'marker' chemicals.

In 1998, Australian scientists found low levels of active ingredients in some echinacea products.

This year another US-based study called *Echinacea and truth in labeling* was published by the American Medical Association. It reported that only 52% of 59 echinacea preparations contained the species listed on the label, and of 21 products that claimed to contain a certain amount of echinacea-specific chemicals, only nine (43%) met their claims. The study also found that six out of the 59 products contained no measurable echinacea.

So we were keen to assess the levels of active ingredients in current Australian echinacea products. We bought 10 top-selling and widely available products, put the pills into plain plastic bottles so their brands couldn't be identified, and sent them off to the pharmacy department of a leading Australian university. We asked the boffins there, who have experience in testing echinacea, to check the pills for a number of specific chemicals that echinacea is known to contain. They used the latest chemical technology and normal scientific procedures (see notes 2 to 4, page 13).

One of these chemicals is the marker compound echinacoside. It's only found in the *E angustifolia* species, which makes it a useful quality marker — products that say they contain *E angustifolia* should have echinacoside present, while those that claim only to contain *E purpurea* should have none of this chemical.

All the products tested gave an echinacoside result that indicated they contained the claimed echinacea species — so far so good.

WHAT ABOUT THE ACTIVES?

We then analysed our capsules and tablets to see if they contained chemicals thought to be among echinacea's active ingredients — specifically, a chemical called **cichoric acid** and a group of chemicals known as **alkylamides**.

Both these chemicals have been shown, mostly in test-tube studies and experiments on animals, to be associated with echinacea's effects on the immune system.

■ The amount of **alkylamides** in echinacea is known to vary widely according to the part of the plant



No help from the label

So you're tempted to try some echinacea despite the lack of conclusive evidence that it works, and the possibility that most products don't contain enough of the active ingredients we tested for to have any effect even if it did (see *Better than a placebo?*, page 12)? Then yet another trap awaits you in the fine print on the label.

Quite a few products on shelves have large numbers on their labels — 'echinacea 2000' or '5000', for example. Fresh echinacea contains around 80% water; some of these large numbers refer to the equivalent weight of fresh herb, others to dry herb weight, or equivalent dry weight. However, it's all rather academic. As several studies, including ours, have shown, the amount of active ingredients in echinacea products varies widely from brand to brand. Nothing on the labels we looked at will help you compare between brands or, in most cases, give any hint of how much active ingredient you're getting. See *Action needed* on page 13 for how CHOICE thinks this situation should change.

used, how it's grown and factors like how the plant is processed and/or extracts are prepared.

The roots of echinacea are known to have higher concentrations of alkylamides than the plant above ground (the herb or 'aerial' parts). So particular products, especially those that contain only the aerial parts of the echinacea plant (such as GNC **Herbal Plus** we tested), or those primarily made from the squeezed juice of the aerial parts (CENOVIS, HERRON, TALLEBUDGERA HERBALS and VITELLE), will naturally have very low levels of these active ingredients.

Most dried, semi-processed *E purpurea* root grown in Australia contains 0.3–0.9% alkylamides. The highest level we found among products containing *E purpurea* root was 0.003% — not very encouraging in terms of what you're paying for.

1 Brand (in alphabetical order)

BLACKMORES Echinacea ACE + Zinc

CENOVIS Echinacea 4500 (A)

EUREKA Extra Echinacea 2000 Combination Formula (A)

GNC Herbal Plus Fingerprinted Echinacea Purpurea

HERBS OF GOLD Echinacea 3000

HERRON Echinacea 5000

NATURE'S OWN Echinacea (A)

PRETORIUS Echinacea 4000 Complex Plus Antioxidants (A)

TALLEBUDGERA HERBALS Echinacea Chewable Tablets (A)

VITELLE Echinacea Extra Strength 4500 (A)

Labelled echinacea species and content (per tablet)

Echinacea purpurea extract equivalent to dry whole plant 500 mg

Echinacea purpurea herb juice 100 mg equivalent to Echinacea purpurea herb fresh 4.5 g

Echinacea angustifolia root powder 250 mg and extracts equivalent to dry Echinacea purpurea herb 1.5 g, dry Echinacea angustifolia root 250 mg, total echinacea 2 g

Echinacea purpurea herb powder 300 mg

Echinacea purpurea extract equivalent to dry whole plant 3000 mg

Echinacea purpurea dry herb juice 111.1 mg equivalent to fresh herb 5 g. Standardised to contain Beta-1,2-D-oligofructurinosides 2.7 mg

Echinacea purpurea as extract equivalent to 500 mg of dry root and rhizome

Echinacea angustifolia extract equivalent to 100 mg dry root and rhizome equivalent to echinacosides 1.11 mg. Echinacea purpurea extract equivalent to Echinacea purpurea dry root and rhizome 1.92 g, with Echinacea purpurea juice concentrate equivalent to fresh herb 1.98 g

Echinacea purpurea extract equivalent to whole plant fresh juice 250 mg

Echinacea purpurea herb juice dry 100 mg equivalent to Echinacea purpurea herb fresh 4.5 g

Maximum daily dose (tablets)*

2 Echinacea species as claimed

Measured content per tablet (mg)

Cichoric acid per mg daily dose

3

✓

0.42

1.26

3

✓

0.58

1.74

3

✓

5.89

17.67

6

✓

2.81

16.86

3

✓

6.17

18.51

3

✓

0.00

0.00

3

✓

1.15

3.45

2

✓

2.37

4.74

6

✓

0.02

0.12

3

✓

0.60

1.80

GOOD FOR SNAKE BITES ...

Native Americans used echinacea as a treatment for snake bites and wounds – and European settlers then began to use it as a cure-all. Eventually, the herb found its way to Germany, where many of the early pioneering studies with echinacea were performed in the early 1900s.

As in previous analytical studies, we found quite a range of cichoric acid concentration, with some products containing very low levels.

As with the alkylamides, there's a natural range of how much cichoric acid you'd expect to find in *E purpurea*. For Australian-grown *E purpurea* the range is around 0.5–2% (a range that matches the levels found in *E purpurea* grown outside Australia – and several of the products we tested are made from overseas-sourced echinacea).

In addition, echinacea products containing only 'herb juice' have been shown to have varying cichoric acid levels. And it's thought that upwards of 60% of cichoric acid can be lost in some manufacturing processes. So all in all it's hard to know how much cichoric acid you'll get in any preparation.

So it's interesting to compare the natural range with what we found in manufactured products. The maximum cichoric acid content we found was 0.94%, which is well within the range expected in the plant, but the next best was 0.29% and the worst 0.08%.

BETTER THAN A PLACEBO?

The products with the highest levels of cichoric acid and alkylamide content were EUREKA Extra Echinacea 2000 and HERBS OF GOLD Echinacea 3000. These give around 18 mg of cichoric acid each, and 2.7 and 1.3 mg of alkylamides, respectively, per recommended maximum daily dose (see the table for all the products). But can even these quantities of these active ingredients be directly correlated to a health benefit?

It's a key question to ask, but difficult to answer. Like most herbal medicines, probably not all of echinacea's active ingredients have been identified, and those that have been aren't often analysed in conjunction with trial results (see *Only works some of the time?*, page 10).

We could find only two clinical trials where the echinacea preparation given was also analysed for active ingredients. In one, the echinacea product contained 0.16% cichoric acid but had almost no echinacoside or alkylamides. Trial participants received a very small daily dose of 1.44 mg cichoric acid – a dose that was ineffective at warding off colds.

The product used in the other trial contained 0.77% cichoric acid and 0.82% alkylamides. This equated to trial participants getting a daily dose of 23 mg of cichoric acid (a bit more than the maximum recommended daily dose provided by EUREKA Extra Echinacea 2000, HERBS OF GOLD Echinacea 3000 and GNC Herbal Plus and a lot more than you'd get from the other products) and 25 mg of alkylamides (a lot more than in any of the products we tested).

This is the most recently reported trial, and it showed that the echinacea product used didn't help otherwise healthy college students with colds. (This is the trial detailed in *A treatment for colds?*, page 9.)

So even if you're an optimist and think it just might be worth taking echinacea, it seems unlikely that the levels of these active ingredients in any of the products we tested are enough to make them worth buying.

BUT HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...

As noted earlier, echinacea experts say that the identities of all its active ingredients probably aren't known. It's likely other chemicals in echinacea, besides cichoric acid and alkylamides, might also be biologically active. For example, when commenting on the level of cichoric acid in their products, HERRON and MAYNE said ingredients like polysaccharides (plant sugars) were also important contributors to any benefit. So it can be argued that other chemicals contribute to



Alkylamides content

Measured content per table (mg)	Alkylamides per maximum daily dose (mg)	Manufacturer / distributor	Size	Price (\$)**
0.32	Blackmores	60 tablets	18.40	
0.02	Mayne Consumer Products	60 capsules	14.40	
2.69	Eureka Oils Australia	30 tablets	10.00	
0.13	GNC/Green Valley Nutrition	90 capsules	19.95	
1.26	Health Minders	30 tablets	19.95	
0.03	Herron Pharmaceuticals	60 tablets	11.80	
0.02	Bullivant's Natural Health Products	90 capsules	18.85	
0.12	Natural Biocare	50 tablets	24.95	
0.01	Tallebudgera Herbs	60 tablets	8.95	
0.03	Mayne Consumer Products	60 capsules	12.75 (B)	

echinacea's health benefits — cichoric acid and alkylamides aren't the whole story.

Scientists nevertheless think that because cichoric acid and alkylamides lack stability and degrade over time, this makes them suitable indicators for echinacea products in general. They may even indicate the level of degradation that might be expected for other active ingredients.

ACTION NEEDED

In the reports we reviewed that looked at levels of active ingredients in manufactured echinacea products, a common finding was that concentrations of active ingredients in consumer products varied greatly.

And the studies concluded that manufacturers should standardise their echinacea products to contain a minimum level of at least one marker chemical or active ingredient. That way, consumers could have at least some confidence in what they're buying. While some manufacturers do standardise some of their products, and two products we tested claimed to have minimum levels of an ingredient (see the table, above), we'd like to see all echinacea products tested and guaranteed to contain a minimum of at least one marker chemical or active ingredient.

We want to see the Complementary Medicines Evaluation Committee, which advises the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on complementary medicines, to propose just this — and the TGA to act.

We'd also like to see the TGA act to ensure that all labels report contents consistently and accurately. It should regularly test, as we have done, what is actually in the bottles.

More broadly, the complementary medicines industry needs a regulatory shape-up. Consumers have the right to know the medicines they buy are of good quality, that they're safe, and that any health claims are based on facts.

* The number of tablets in a maximum recommended daily dose. In a non-standardised product (which includes most of those tested) this won't give you any indication of how much active ingredient you'll be taking. See No help from the label, page 11, for more on this.

** Prices are what we paid in August 2003.

(A) The manufacturer says this product has been or will soon be discontinued.

(B) 20% discount from marked price of \$15.95.

1 Brands tested

As for most of our tests, we tested one sample of each product, on the basis that you could have walked into a shop and bought the same thing as a consumer yourself. Other batches may have a slightly different active ingredient content, but our results are a sample of what any consumer could buy.

2 Echinacea species as claimed

We measured the quantity of ecinacoside by a standard HPLC (high-performance liquid chromatography) technique used for drug analysis. Echinacoside is a chemical marker used to distinguish *Echinacea angustifolia* from *Echinacea purpurea*: the former contains it while the latter doesn't.

3 Cichoric acid content

We analysed the pills for this active ingredient by the same HPLC standard technique used for echinacoside.

4 Alkylamides

We used the same HPLC analytical technique to work out how much alkylamides the products contained. Unlike cichoric acid, alkylamides vary in concentration around the plant, with roots containing relatively high levels and aerial parts very low levels. However, the measured content in all the tested products was very low (see *What about the actives?*, page 11).



AUSTRIAN IMAGES

Less fat — but still fattening

McDonald's is now offering some low-fat options. It claims its new **Salads Plus** menu offers "Food that is light yet high in taste — to leave you feeling good". But while definitely a step in the right direction with at least 60% less fat than a **Big Mac**, the new menu options can still load on the kilojoules.

The **Roast Chicken Salad** (with 872 kJ) isn't a bad bet, but a **Chicken Foldover** packs 1836 kJ, which is 33 kJ more than a **McChicken**, and a **Vege Burger** has 1707 kJ, only about 340 kJ less than a **Big Mac**.

And watch out for the extras. If you round off your **Chicken Foldover** with an orange poppy seed **Muffin Lite** (1634 kJ) and wash it down with a medium **Diet Coke** (6 kJ) you're up for a total of 3476 kJ — which is already more than 60% of the daily 5600 kJ provided by the CSIRO's **Total Wellbeing Diet** (see below) that's designed to help you lose weight.



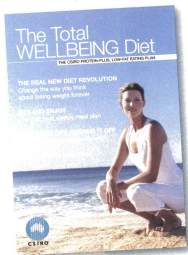
HAD A GUTFUL?

Fad diets to lose weight are rife and most of us are confused to some extent about what we should — or shouldn't — be eating. Now the CSIRO has come up with the **Total Wellbeing Diet**. While it's been described in the media as a "high-protein" diet, in reality it's nothing like any of the high-protein fads such as the Atkins Diet. It would be better described as low-fat with moderate protein and carbohydrates. It has adequate fibre, and should be varied and interesting enough to stick to. Three of the suggested dinners include fish and there's ample fruit, vegetables, wholegrain bread and other cereals. It seems the protein makes you feel comfortably full, so there's less temptation to overeat — at least, that's what the people who trialled it for the CSIRO found.

That said, vegetarians need not apply; it's a meat-based diet, which isn't surprising, given that it was developed in conjunction with Meat and Livestock Australia.

There's a booklet (left) describing the diet plan that has recipes and two weeks' worth of meal suggestions to follow (free from Meat and Livestock Australia by phoning 1800 550 018, or download it from www.hsn.csiro.au).

Although the diet's been designed specifically for women, it's OK for men too (but they could eat a bit more protein and about 20% more food all up).



And coming soon...

In future we might be able to enjoy eating in virtual reality — dispensing with the kilojoules altogether!

Japanese scientists are developing a device that supposedly mimics the entire eating experience. Linked to a computer, the device fits in your mouth. When it's chewed, a sensor registers the force of your bite and a motor provides appropriate resistance. At the same time, it squirts out a mixture of chemicals that simulate flavour, and a tiny speaker plays the sound of a chewing jawbone in your ear. The scientists say they've successfully simulated many foods, including cheese, crackers, confectionery and Japanese snacks.

It might interfere with the dinnertime conversation, though — at CHOICE we were nicely brought up and we don't talk with our mouths full of machinery.

SUN SAFETY

If recent media reports about the risk of vitamin D deficiency have made you think twice about using sunscreen — think again.

We all know it — it's no use being in denial: if you want to avoid skin cancer you have to protect yourself from the sun. The question is how, without becoming a monk.

Most of the sun's dangerous UV radiation (as much as 70%) heads earthward in the middle of the day, so if you're heading outside then, you need to take particular care to seek shade, cover up, wear a hat and use sunscreen on any bits not already under cover.

And the amount of UV you get in the first 20 years of your life is especially significant, so you need to take particular care of kids in the sun.

CAN YOU GET TOO LITTLE?

What to make then of recent reports that suggested a risk of covering up too much — using sunscreen too much — and getting too little sun as a result? It's been suggested that there's a risk of becoming deficient in vitamin D and getting weak bones or osteoporosis (our skin needs sunlight to make vitamin D).

Some research also suggests too little vitamin D may be linked to other diseases, such as multiple sclerosis, high blood pressure and some cancers. And researchers agree that there are some people who might not make enough vitamin D because they see too little sun — but they sure aren't those of us looking for an excuse not to bother with sunscreen when we're out and about. And certainly

IMAGE BANK

not the beach-goers, bushwalkers, park-players and outdoor sportspeople among us, to name a few.

Who is at risk? Not surprisingly it's those of us who see almost nothing of the sun:

- Elderly people (often in care) who don't, or can't, move about much.
- Women who always wear veils and covering clothing for cultural or religious reasons (and who may also have darker skin that needs more sun to make vitamin D than fairer-skinned people).
- And maybe in some very rare cases inactive couch potatoes who prefer computer games and TV to setting foot outside at any time of day.

TOO MUCH IS MORE LIKELY

For virtually everyone else, there's enough sun to be got just going about our daily business — you don't have to try hard to get it. In fact spending as little as 10 minutes outside before 10 am is probably all that's needed.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Fact 1:** Skin cancer can kill.
- **Fact 2:** It's caused by the sun.
- **Fact 3:** You can protect yourself safely.
- **Fact 4:** You're very unlikely to get too little sun, so don't fool yourself.





SOLARIUMS

There's no such thing as a safe tan, and solariums are no safer than sunning yourself, so don't be fooled.

For more on solariums and the new standard requiring warnings and other safety issues, see CHOICE, May 2003, page 6.

Choosing to forgo sun protection and heading out into the sun for long periods is a bit like using the news that a glass or two of red wine may be good for you to go out and get smashed most nights of the week. So don't fall for the 'if a little is good, a lot must be fantastic' school of thought — it simply isn't true.

USING ENOUGH

The other trap it's easy to fall into with sunscreens is virtuously aiming a squirt or two at yourself and considering the job done. Most people don't use nearly enough — in fact often less than half as much as they need to. And half as much sunscreen means less than half as much protection — which isn't half good enough.

As one expert dermatologist put it to us, it's like painting a wall. If you put one coat on,

Sun stuff

- Relying on sunscreen to do all the sun protection, rather than covering up and staying out of the worst of the sun's rays, can mean you get more UV exposure over time, not less.
- Sunscreen gradually allows a little UV through, which will eventually let you start to burn. Once you reach this stage, putting on more sunscreen can't stop it — you need to get out of the sun, fast.
- A good quality t-shirt (which isn't worn or thin) is enough to protect the bits it covers — you don't need special sun

you're going to get bare spots — so you're better off with two. And if you're having to push the sunscreen across your skin, rather than it gliding on, it's as if you don't have enough paint on your brush. You need about 30 mL (six teaspoons) to cover your whole body — quite a bit more than most people might think.

The best advice? Put one generous coat on whatever bits aren't under clothing or hats about 20 minutes before you go out in the sun and another when you're ready to go. You'll get better coverage, be using more like the right amount and be giving time for the sunscreen to interact and 'bond' with your skin. Don't rub it in — spread it around. And reapply sunscreen at least every two hours and after swimming and exercise, whether it's water-resistant or not.

CHOOSING A SUNSCREEN: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

There are lots of sunscreens out there — is there any difference between them? There are a few things to look for:

■ **SPF (sun protection factor) 30+:** An SPF of 30 blocks 97% of the sun's rays; 30+ might mean 31 or 60 or even 100, but the actual number isn't important. Using SPF 30+ gives you very high but not complete protection.

■ Also look for a **broad-spectrum** sunscreen. This means it screens both UVA and UVB rays, both of which are important in skin cancer development and skin ageing. One recent study, which got a lot of media attention, highlighted the fact that sunscreens in particular don't block 100% of the sun's UVA rays — once again emphasising that they don't give complete protection but are only a second line of defence. Avoiding the sun in the middle of the day, seeking shade, covering up and relying on sunscreen only for the bits you can't cover is your best course of action.

■ If you're going to be spending any time in the water, **water-resistant** sunscreens are available. But no matter how long they claim to stay on (many claim four hours), don't take a risk: reapply your sunscreen every two hours or as soon as you come out of the water (you'll probably towel a lot of it off anyway).

Sunscreens for kids and sensitive skin

You don't necessarily need a special sunscreen for kids — there's little evidence to suggest there's a safety issue with sunscreen's active ingredients. However, very young children (under six months) are better kept out of the sun, especially in the middle of the day, using hats, clothes and shade. If you occasionally need to use sunscreen on babies, only apply it to small areas of skin that can't be otherwise covered.

Some sunscreens are marketed specifically for toddlers, infants and children, or people with sensitive skin. They may contain more physical blockers and fewer chemical absorbers, or simply use fewer possible irritants in the cream base. This isn't a question of safety — they're just less likely to irritate sensitive skin. For more on blockers and absorbers, see note 2, page 19.

clothes. However, it should have a collar or high neck, and sleeves at least to the elbows.

- A tan doesn't protect you against skin cancer or sunburn. Depending on your skin type, a tan only gives you the same protection as an SPF 2 or 4 sunscreen.
- Store your sunscreen in a cool place — it can lose its effectiveness if you leave it in the glovebox or in the sun.
- If your sunscreen goes past its use-by date, separates or gets sluggish, throw it out — it may no longer do the job properly.

Keeping in mind that using enough is the key to getting full 30+ protection, we asked over 350 CHOICE Home Testers to try more than 40 SPF 30+ sunscreens. We asked them to consider how easy they were to apply, how well they were absorbed and whether they liked the fragrance and texture. The results are in the table on page 18.

Our trialists were most influenced by the texture of a sunscreen, but the fragrance was also important. They also liked sunscreens that were easy to rub in and absorbed completely. See *What to buy*, below right, for the sunscreens that were the most popular overall.

Sunscreen can be very expensive, but our results show you don't have to spend a fortune to get one that's pleasant to use. Both the cheapest and the most expensive sunscreens tested feature in our top seven. And, of course, if it's good to use, you're more likely to use enough to get full SPF 30+ protection.

BUYING WITH CONFIDENCE

How can you be confident when you buy 30+ that you get what you're paying for? While the relevant authorities have to keep in mind the possibility of a disreputable manufacturer deliberately falsifying results to get around regulations, all the experts we spoke to were confident that the regulations currently in place are enough to ensure consumers get what they're paying for.

Manufacturers of sunscreens over SPF 4 must be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), and they must be able to demonstrate they comply with the Code of Good Manufacturing Practice for sunscreens. Manufacturers are also audited about once every two years by the TGA and it told CHOICE that it's never found any critical problems during an audit.

Experts also tell us that in their experience where people have reported getting burnt despite using a sunscreen, it hasn't been an SPF problem but rather not enough sunscreen being used.

In short, you should be able to buy any SPF 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreen with reasonable confidence. Choose based on price and personal preference, and make sure you use enough — our table gives you a guide to what our trialists thought of over 40 on the market.

SKIN CANCER

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. Melanoma is the most dangerous and can quickly spread to other parts of the body.

When you're out in the sun, you get both UVA and UVB rays from the sun, and both types contribute to skin damage, skin cancer and melanoma.

But UV radiation isn't just a catalyst for skin cancer, it also further increases your risk by suppressing your immune system — an important defence against melanoma and other skin cancers.

It's also been suggested by some researchers, based on their results in animals, that the type of fat in your diet can have a role to play in skin cancer. However, the animal evidence that polyunsaturated fat may increase the risk isn't widely accepted at this point. Other possible dietary factors have also been suggested but not proven, such as too little zinc or vitamins like B₆, A and E.

Catching skin cancers early is important, so check your skin regularly for suspicious spots. The Cancer Council Australia advises you to look for:

- A crusty, non-healing sore.
- A small lump which is red, pale or pearly in colour.
- A spot, freckle or mole changing in colour, thickness or shape over a period of several weeks to months. Pay particular attention to spots that are dark brown to black, red or blue-black.

If any spot looks suspicious, have it checked out by your doctor.

WHAT TO BUY

	Price per 100 mL/g
LE TAN SPF 30+ General Purpose Family Lotion	\$9.59 (see (D), p 18)
BARE ZONE SPF 30+ Everyday Sunscreen Cream	\$8.79 (see (E), p 18)
FACE OF AUSTRALIA SPF 30+ Non Greasy Lotion	\$3.18 (see (E), p 18)
HAMILTON SPF 30+ Family Sunscreen Milk	\$9.56
TARGET SPF 30+ Sunscreen Lotion	\$2.80 (see (E), p 18)
HOME BRAND SPF 30+ Sunscreen Lotion	\$1.20 (see (F), p 18)
NUTRI METICS SPF 30+ Sun Days Sunscreen Cream	\$15.33



Sunscreen (all SPF 30+, broad-spectrum)	Type	1 Overall score (%)	1 Fragrance score (%)	1 Texture score (%)	1 Absorption score (%)	1 Ease of rubbing in score (%)	Absorbers	Blockers
LE TAN General Purpose Family	Lotion	71	66	70	83	77	✓	✓
BARE ZONE Everyday	Cream	70	65	66	84	63	✓	✓
FACE OF AUSTRALIA Non Greasy	Lotion	68	58	63	81	64	✓	✓
HAMILTON Family	Milk	68	61	65	78	55	✓	✓
TARGET	Lotion	68	67	68	83	76	✓	✓
HOME BRAND	Lotion	68	65	70	79	66	✓	✓
NUTRI METICS Sun Days	Cream	68	70	62	78	54	✓	✓
FACE OF AUSTRALIA Non Greasy	Cream	66	47	64	88	72	✓	✓
SUNSENSE Ultra	Milk	65	56	66	81	68	✓	✓
AMBRE SOLAIRE Hydrating (A)	Milk	64	67	64	82	45	✓	✓
AQUASUN	Cream	64	66	64	77	67	✓	✓
SOUL PATINSON Ultra Block	Lotion	63	53	63	77	66	✓	✓
HAMILTON Family	Cream	63	62	49	71	45	✓	✓
AQUASUN	Lotion	63	67	59	70	59	✓	✓
UV TRIPLECARD (B)	Cream	62	64	56	71	45	✓	✓
AUSCREEN New Generation	Lotion	62	55	60	82	65	✓	✓
UV TRIPLECARD (B)	Lotion	61	58	58	73	53	✓	✓
DAVID JONES	Lotion	61	47	63	81	74	✓	✓
AMCAL	Lotion	60	52	61	83	64	✓	✓
AMWAY Suntime Ultra Block	Lotion	60	49	64	78	62	✓	✓
PERSONA	Lotion	59	50	65	76	61	✓	✓
BANANA BOAT Ultra	Lotion	57	60	51	72	39	✓	✓
AVON Sunseekers Protective	Lotion	57	54	54	69	56	✓	✓
THE BODY SHOP SOS Sun Cover (C)	Cream	56	43	53	70	53	✓	✓
INNOXA Sun Defence	Lotion	54	51	52	66	44	✓	✓
SOLARBLOCK for Every Body	Lotion	54	51	58	76	60	✓	✓
RIP CURL Surf	Lotion	54	51	53	67	43	✓	✓
NO FRILLS (B)	Cream	52	54	42	65	38	✓	✓
THE CANCER COUNCIL Everyday	Cream	52	44	47	72	45	✓	✓
BI-LO (B)	Lotion	51	52	47	73	44	✓	✓
HAWAIIAN TROPIC Protection Plus	Lotion	50	42	46	67	51	✓	✓
REDX	Lotion	49	40	45	64	42	✓	✓
LE TAN	Gel	46	41	31	73	69	✓	✓
CHEMWORLD	Lotion	42	36	39	59	37	✓	✓
AMCAL	Gel	41	41	34	79	78	✓	✓
DAVID JONES	Gel	41	29	34	68	63	✓	✓
SUNSENSE Clear	Gel	40	27	36	78	76	✓	✓
REDX Sports	Gel	40	28	33	78	74	✓	✓
FACE OF AUSTRALIA Sun	Gel	39	31	32	72	68	✓	✓
SOLARBLOCK Surf & Sport	Gel	36	31	35	74	63	✓	✓
AUSCREEN	Gel	35	22	32	68	72	✓	✓

* Prices based on manufacturer information in September 2003, unless otherwise noted.

(A) For children and sensitive skins.*

(B) The formulation has changed since we tested, which may affect scores. In the case of Bi-Lo, the new formulation only contains blockers.

(C) The formulation will be changed in the New Year, which may affect scores.

(D) The price we found in October 2003 for the pack size closest to 150 mL; it may be available in larger packs at a cheaper price.

(E) Prices for the pack size closest to 150 mL; also available in a larger bulk pack, which is cheaper per 100 mL.

(F) The price we found for 1 L in October 2003; not available in a smaller size.

(G) Avon sunscreen is available for a reduced price during the summer months.

Claimed water resistance (hours) Price per 100 mL / g (\$)*

9.59 (D)
8.79 (E)
3.18 (E)
9.56
2.80 (E)
1.20 (F)
15.33
5.95
7.96 (E)
6.65 (D)
4.46 (E)
5.56 (D)
10.95
4.46 (E)
9.50 (E)
3.99 (D)
9.50 (E)
8.63 (E)
7.16 (D)
7.81 (D)
2.69 (E)
7.75 (E)
11.96 (E) (G)
7.25 (D)
14.95
5.99 (E)
6.63
2.16 (D)
7.23 (E)
1.92 (E)
7.46 (D)
8.68
7.99 (D)
6.50 (E)
6.36 (D)
8.63
8.76
8.68
5.95
5.97
5.20 (D)

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH GELS?

A quick look at the table reveals that most of our Home Testers weren't impressed overall with the gel products they tried. The biggest bugbear was the strong smell, variously described as medicinal, alcohol, chemical or antiseptic. They also weren't keen on the texture. However, trialists did find they generally absorbed well and were easy to rub in.

Our results, however, are for what most people like — and gels are very different from the more commonly used creams, milks and lotions. If you use a gel it's probably for perceived benefits like being easier to apply if you have a lot of body hair or absorbing well and not leaving your skin sticky. For some people this can outweigh the strong smell, which eventually fades anyway as the gel evaporates. But if you're like the majority of our Home Testers, you probably won't see it that way.

We included all the SPF 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreens we could find. We didn't include special-purpose sunscreens (for example, for children or sensitive skins) unless this was a brand's standard general product.

1 Trial scores

More than 350 of our Home Testers tried seven sunscreens each — each brand was tried by about 45 people. They used one each day on their forearms and assessed each sunscreen for fragrance, texture, absorption and the amount of effort it took to rub in, and noted if it caused any irritation (very few people noted any, and even then it was mostly minor). They also gave it an overall score. They didn't assess sun protection — all SPF 30+ products should provide similar protection as long as you use the right amount.



2 Ingredients

There are two major types of active ingredient in sunscreens:

■ Absorbers

These are chemicals that absorb UV radiation, stopping it from reaching your skin. UVB absorbers include octyl methoxycinnamate, octyl salicylate and 4-methylbenzylidene-camphor, while UVA absorbers include butylmethoxydibenzoylmethane and some benzophenones (such as dioxibenzene).

They can cause irritation and even allergies in rare cases. If you're trying a new sunscreen and have sensitive skin, do a patch test on your inner arm and leave it for 24 hours to see if there's any reaction.

■ Blockers

These are usually minute particles of zinc oxide or titanium dioxide that reflect and scatter UV radiation. They have no known side effects, but can

leave your skin looking ghostly. Some newer formulations use microfine particles — they're extremely finely ground and make any whiteness less obvious.

Although some concerns have been raised about such fine particles getting into the lower layers of the skin, available evidence suggests this doesn't happen.

Sunscreens using blockers may be more suitable for children and people with sensitive skins: see *Sunscreens for kids and sensitive skin*, page 16.

3 Water resistance

If you're going swimming, look for a product that says it's water-resistant. However, don't be misled by labels that say 'water-resistant for four hours': it may well stay on your body under ideal conditions for this amount of time, but conditions are rarely ideal and it's best to reapply it more often for maximum effect.



Choc chip HEAVEN

There's nothing like a good biscuit to dunk in your cuppa — here's the lowdown on the best choc chip biscuits on your supermarket shelf.



IN A NUTSHELL

I You might have to pay a bit more for the biscuit that blew the others out of the water, but judging by our trialists' comments, it's well worth it.

As all sweet tooths out there would understand, there wasn't a lot of arm-twisting needed to convince our Home Testers to take part in a trial of choc chip biscuits. And judging by our results, there are choc chip biscuits — and then there are choc chip biscuits.

We included every brand we could find in supermarkets that didn't include other added ingredients such as nuts, have added vanilla flavour or a chocolate coating or base. In all, 18 brands of biscuit were put to the taste test.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

By a clear margin, **ARNOTT'S Premier Chocolate Chip Cookies**. They were described as rich and sweet, with choc chips that were soft, smooth and velvety. One of the reasons for their popularity was most likely their high quantity of choc chips, with chocolate making up around 40% of each biscuit.

They were also the second-most expensive biscuits to buy, but the very cheap ones were all much less popular.

The choc chips in **ARNOTT'S Premier Chocolate Chip Cookies** are also 'real' as opposed to compound chocolate. The difference is the main fat source: traditional chocolate, such as milk or dark chocolate, contains cocoa butter, which melts in the mouth and helps contribute to the smooth mouthfeel and taste. Compound chocolate is a cheaper version that contains vegetable fat in place of some or all of the cocoa butter. This can give it a waxier mouthfeel and taste. See the table for which biscuits contain real or compound chocolate, and also how much.

And what about lower-fat biscuits (**PARADISE Lites**, **WEIGHT WATCHERS** and **ARNOTT'S Farmbake Lite**)? Judging by our trialists' results, unless you eat a lot of biscuits every day they're probably not worth bothering with. They were rated significantly lower overall for taste and texture, and perceived as having less chocolate and smaller choc chips. ■



PHOTOS: LITE MEDIAN

Brand	Overall score (%)	Choc chips as % of biscuits	Type of chocolate	Price per 500 g (\$)*
ARNOTT'S Premier Chocolate Chip Cookies	75	40	Chocolate	5.35
PARKWOOD Chocolate Chip Cookies (Aldi)	65	27	Chocolate	4.23
IGA Deluxe Chocolate Chip Cookies	64	25	Chocolate	4.49
NABISCO Chips Ahoy New Recipe	60	21	Chocolate	4.46
PARADISE Cottage Cookies Homemade Taste Choc Chip	58	15	Chocolate	3.14
NO FRILLS Cookies Choc Chip	55	24	Chocolate	4.97
WESTONS Additions Minis Choc Chip	51	27	Compound	4.98
WESTONS Additions Minis Double Choc	50	26	Compound	4.98
ARNOTT'S Farmbake Cookies Chocolate Chip	47	13	Chocolate	3.53
WEIGHT WATCHERS Chocolate Chip Cookies	44	19	Chocolate	5.85
WESTONS Bakehouse Homestyle Baked Cookies Choc Chip	40	8	Compound	2.22
FARMLAND Choc Chip Cookies	38	8	Compound	1.99
PARADISE Lites Choc Chip Cookies	38	13	Chocolate	4.84
BI-LO Choc Chip Cookies	37	8	Compound	1.97
BLACK & GOLD Choc Chip Cookies	37	9	Compound	2.00
WESTONS Choc Chip Biscuits	37	11	Compound	2.48
PLAYERS Choc Chip Cookies	34	9	Dark compound	2.37
ARNOTT'S Farmbake Lite Cookies Chocolate Chip	32	7	Chocolate	4.01

* Based on the price we paid in May 2003, and expressed as a price per 500 g so it's easy to compare.



TASTING THOSE COOKIES

Thanks to the Home Testers who took part in this trial. We sent five brands of biscuit to each of the 200 trialists, and each brand was trialled approximately 50 times. The biscuits were sent in boxes in unmarked, airtight bags to ensure freshness and so that the trialists couldn't recognise the brands.

**CHOICE
HOME
TESTER**

What to buy

ARNOTT'S PREMIER CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Price: \$4.20 for 400 g

Trialist comments

"Huge difference between this and all other brands."

"This is probably one of the best-tasting biscuits that I've tried that's mass-produced."

"Loved this biscuit."

On the road again

The real meaning of all those fine-print conditions, and how to find the right cover for your overseas trip.

IN A NUTSHELL

- We surveyed 83 international travel insurance policies and list our **Best Buys** for a family travelling to the US or Europe for a four-week holiday or to New Zealand for 16 days (far right).
- For the first time we've also checked free travel insurance policies attached to credit and charge cards. While those you get with the gold cards of the four major banks give reasonable cover, you still need to check the small print before you decide it's all the cover you need.
- The **AMERICAN EXPRESS** Platinum charge card also offers comprehensive travel insurance. However, this cover didn't score well for travel to the US and Europe. See Free cover with your credit card, below right, for details.

Each year Department of Foreign Affairs staff handle the cases of around 16,000 Australians who've suffered illness, theft, assault or an accident while overseas.

If something like this happens to you, travel insurance can at least take care of the financial burden — for example, daily hospitalisation costs in south-east Asia regularly exceed \$800 and medical evacuation from the US may cost up to \$300,000.

We looked at 83 international travel insurance policies and five policies available to gold or platinum credit and charge cardholders and found that conditions, exclusions, amounts of cover and premiums vary greatly from policy to policy. We recommend you read several policies before making your final decision. For some of the things to look out for, see *Tips and traps*, page 25.

Three policies now again offer some cover against travel company insolvency — immediately after the Ansett demise all the policies we looked at excluded this. Unfortunately the only insurer that provides full cover is the Victorian automobile club (RACV) and the cover is only available to RACV members. A more restricted cover is available for WESTPAC and COMMONWEALTH gold cardholders.

Terrorism exclusions were added after September 11. Cancellation cover in the case of terrorism is not available with any of the policies, but a number of insurers at least offer medical and repatriation cover if you're injured.

FREE COVER WITH YOUR CREDIT CARD

If you have a gold credit card, your financial institution may offer you free overseas travel insurance.

We checked the travel insurance attached to gold cards offered by the big four banks and by the **AMERICAN EXPRESS** Platinum charge card. While the banks' policies provide reasonable cover for all three locations covered

Best Buys

These are the **Best Buys** for a family (two adults and an unlimited number of dependent children under 21) travelling to the US for 28 days, Europe for 28 days and New Zealand for 16 days. If you're travelling as a couple you'll usually pay the same as the family premium; single travellers generally pay about half the family premium.

Recommendations are for a cheap policy with good comprehensive cover for the destination (a CHOICE policy score of 65% or more for the US and Europe and 55% or higher for New Zealand), as well as:

- No excess or an excess buyout (a flat fee paid at the time of taking out the policy so that you pay no excess if you make a claim).
- Adventure activities covered: hiking and skiing.
- Medium baggage cover: at least \$12,000 total cover limit for the US and Europe and \$6000 for New Zealand, plus \$2000 for a video or still camera (included or available for an additional premium).
- Cover for cancellation due to unforeseen retrenchment.
- Cover for collision damage excess for a rental car included or available for an additional premium.



THE BEST BUYS ARE:

■ US, 28 days

HBFG Gold: \$392 (\$353 for HBF members), no excess, 79%.

RACV Plan A+: \$414, no excess, 72% (members' policy 77%).

AUSTRALIAN UNITY Plan A: \$361 (\$100 excess or \$15 excess buyout), 69%.

■ Europe, 28 days

STA Policy A+: \$441 (\$100 excess or \$10 excess buyout), 74%.

HBFG Gold: \$392 (\$353 for HBF members), no excess, 73%.

RACV Plan A: \$360, no excess, 72% (members' policy 77%).

SURESAVE Holiday Europe: \$342, no excess, 71%.

■ New Zealand, 16 days

SURESAVE Holiday Bali/New Zealand: \$160, no excess, 71%.

AUSTRALIAN UNITY Plan D: \$177 (\$100 excess or \$15 excess buyout), 62%.

RACV Plan C: \$165, no excess, 56% (members' policy 60%).

If you're looking for the cheapest available policy with a reasonable policy score you may want to consider:

■ For the US: COLUMBUS DIRECT Worldwide: \$238, 67%.

■ For Europe: COLUMBUS DIRECT Europe/Asia: \$218, 67%.

■ For New Zealand: COLUMBUS DIRECT New Zealand/South Pacific:

\$103, 71%.

These policies don't meet the **Best Buy** criteria as they have a \$125 excess for a number of sections of the policy, including cancellation and luggage, and \$250 excess for medical expenses. An excess buyout isn't available and the excess applies per person, so if a whole four-person family fell ill, a total excess of \$1000 would apply. It also only allows cover of \$750 for video/photo equipment and cover is included for only three children up to 19 years of age on the family policy.

HOW WE SCORED

The score is a combination of the following aspects:

- Medical cover: 35% of the total.
- Baggage: 25%.
- Cancellation/additional expenses: 25%.
- Personal liability: 15%.

in our Best Buys, AMERICAN EXPRESS Platinum didn't score well for travel to the US and Europe because of cover limitations and restrictions. For example, we recommend unlimited medical cover for these destinations and this policy only covers you for \$1 million (see the table, page 24, for more details).

These policies work differently from normal travel insurance policies: you usually don't need to apply for the cover, simply pay for all or, with some policies, part of your travel costs with your card and you're automatically covered.

However, it's still important to get a copy of the policy to check the cover conditions before you decide it's all the cover you'll need. Also note down the contact details of the assistance company to contact in case of an emergency while overseas.

Compared with normal travel insurance policies there are some special conditions:

- Cover is only provided if you pay your travel costs

with your card. Conditions vary: sometimes you only need to pay for part of the costs (such as \$250), sometimes the full cost. You need to take the receipts away with you as proof that you're covered if you claim.

- Cover is only available for international travel (travel to Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands is sometimes deemed to be international travel).
- Cover is available to the cardholder, your spouse and dependent children. However, you usually need to all travel together, and the travel costs of your spouse and children need to be paid for with the card (see above). Some policies also cover a second cardholder travelling alone.
- There are age restrictions — usually up to 80 (normal travel insurance policies usually charge a surcharge for older travellers).
- There are restrictions on the duration of travel, such as up to 30 days for travel with a one-way ticket or three months with a return ticket.

There are also some pitfalls:

- All policies have an excess (usually \$200) that you need to pay if you make a claim.
- As with normal travel insurance policies, pre-existing medical conditions are covered only if you specifically apply and the insurer approves. If it's available at all (see the table), it's usually only for the main cardholder, not for your spouse or children.
- If you want to hire a car, check the conditions on cover for the collision damage excess waiver. With WESTPAC and COMMONWEALTH policies you're only covered if you've taken out and paid for all — even discretionary — waivers that the rental company offers.
- Check whether all activities you want to engage in are covered.

THE LESS PRECIOUS METALS

Some free travel cover is also available with other cards, such as the AMERICAN EXPRESS Green and Gold and DINERS CLUB charge cards:

- DINERS CLUB's travel inconvenience insurance only covers you for up to \$600 in the case of flight delay, missed connections and delayed or lost luggage.
- AMERICAN EXPRESS's travel accident insurance covers Green and Gold charge cardholders for death or loss of a limb in an accident during transport, such as on a flight. Cover is up to \$250,000 for Gold and \$150,000 for Green cardholders. There's no travel cover with AMERICAN EXPRESS credit cards.

Similar policies may also be offered by some credit cards. We're concerned that some people may confuse this cover with a normal travel insurance policy and find themselves not covered if something goes wrong during their holiday.

If you have a credit or charge card that offers this type of cover, make sure you understand the restrictions.

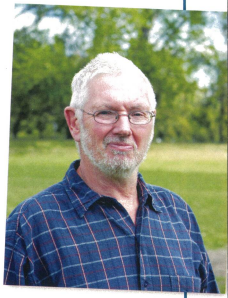
PRE-EXISTING MEANS PLANNING AHEAD

Although Steve had booked his overseas travel well in advance, he didn't get around to taking out travel insurance until just before his departure. He checked CHOICE Online's compare-a-product feature and started contacting the companies whose policies were recommended.

"I soon found that my well-managed hypertension still required me and my doctor to complete a medical appraisal and submit it to many of the insurers before they would issue a policy. There was just no time to do all this."

Steve kept looking and eventually found one or two policies that said well-managed hypertension wasn't considered a pre-existing medical condition for travel insurance.

If possible, take out a policy as soon as you've booked and paid for your travel, in case something happens and you need to change or cancel before you leave. If you've got a medical condition, find out how it's treated by the insurers — start looking at policies well before you leave, even if you haven't made your final bookings.



Financial institution and gold card (in alphabetical order)*	POLICY SCORES (%)			CONDITIONS					Pre-existing medical conditions covered†	Ballot
	Travel to the US	Travel to Europe	Travel to New Zealand	Annual fee (\$)	Travel costs to be paid with card**	Max. length of journey (per year)	Excess (\$)			
AMERICAN EXPRESS Platinum Charge Card (A)	46	48	58	900	Lloyd's: \$100; ACE: full airfare (D)	90 days for one trip, 183 days per year	100	✓		
ANZ Visa Gold	71	73	73	87	\$250	4 months for one trip, no limit on days per year	200	✓		
COMMONWEALTH Gold Visa, Gold Mastercard	70	72	72	114	90% of airfare	30 days one-way ticket; no limit on return ticket	200	✓ (E)		
NATIONAL Gold Visa, Gold Mastercard	73 (B)	75 (C)	75 (C)	88.30	50% of total pre-travel expenses.	90 days for one trip, no limit on days per year	200			✓
WESTPAC Gold Visa, Gold Mastercard, Altitude Gold	72	74	74	90 Gold Visa, Mastercard, 125 Altitude Gold	Full cost of airfare	No cover one-way ticket; three months return ticket	200	✓ (E)		

* Check with the financial institution for restrictions. For example, cover may not be available with business credit cards.

** Sometimes instead of paying with the credit card, rewards points earned with the card can be used.

† Where cover is available, it's only on application and subject to approval; usually only available to the main cardholder.

†† Check with the insurers as conditions apply. For example, hiking is only covered if you don't use ropes, motorcycles are usually only covered up to 200 cc, and for scuba diving you need to dive with an instructor or have an open-water diving licence.

(A) This card is only available by invitation. Membership includes other travel benefits such as reservations, discounts, upgrades and special offers for flights, hotels,

restaurants, events and car rental. Also included is a range of other services, including special events and travel packages and roadside and home assistance in a crisis.

(B) 67% for cardholders over 75.

(C) 69% for cardholders over 75.

(D) This cover is provided by two separate policies underwritten by two different underwriters: the most important sections of the policy, such as medical and

TIPS AND TRAPS

- You're only covered for a pre-existing medical condition if you've notified your insurer and they've agreed to cover you for it, usually for an additional premium.
- Pregnancy is usually regarded as a pre-existing medical condition — check until which stage of the pregnancy you're covered and whether a premature baby would be covered.
- If you've rented a car, check the insurance excess with the car rental company and whether your travel insurance gives you enough cover. Make sure it covers the type of car you want to rent: some insurers exclude 4WDs, campervans and convertibles.
- Check the cover limit for valuable items like your camera or jewellery. You may be able to increase it for an additional premium.
- Check cover conditions for your luggage — there are usually restrictions on baggage left in a car and on checked-in luggage. Valuables like jewellery or mobile phones may not be covered. With most policies cash is only covered while it's "on your person"; if it's stolen from your locked hotel room you're usually not covered.
- Usually policies for a family or single person cover your children at no extra cost, but you need to check. However, limits and age restrictions apply.
- Check age limits on policies — some specific backpacker policies are only available

- for travellers under 45. Otherwise age limits usually apply from age 65 or 70. Over that age you might be charged an additional premium, have to pay an additional excess and/or need a medical check to get cover.
- There may also be age limits on your relatives if you need to cancel because someone in your family is seriously ill. This may not be covered at all if they have a pre-existing condition, and usually you're only covered for relatives living in Australia (with some insurers, also in New Zealand).
- If you're planning adventure activities such as bungee jumping, scuba diving, hot-air ballooning, white-water rafting or motorcycling, check whether your insurance provides cover for this, what the conditions/restrictions are and whether you need to pay an additional premium.
- Some insurers give you a discount of around 10% on the premium if you buy cover online. However, check all details, as STA, for example, gives a discount but also raises the excess to \$250 for online bookings.
- Check travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for your destination — you'll find it at www.smarttraveller.gov.au, or call 1300 139 281. If the department warns against travelling in one of the countries you want to visit, check with your insurer, as you may not be covered while you're there.

Insurer contacts

- **AFTA TRAVEL INSURANCE** from QBE: 1300 555 017; www.afta.com.au.
- **AUSSITRAVELCOVER** from Allianz: (02) 9979 8888, free call 1800 888 448; www.aussitruavelcover.com.au.
- **AUSTRALIAN UNITY** from American Home Assurance Company: 13 29 39; www.australianunity.com.au.
- **CGU**: 13 29 42; www.cgu.com.au.
- **COLUMBUS DIRECT** from Lloyd's of London: 1300 669 999; www.columbusdirect.com.au.
- **COVER-MORE** from Royal & Sun Alliance: 1300 728 822; www.covermore.com.au.
- **HBF**: 132 065; www.hbf.com.au.
- **QANTAS** from QBE: 1300 555 031; www.qantas.com.au.
- **QBE TRAVEL INSURANCE**: 1300 555 017.
- **RACV** from Allianz: 13 13 29; www.racv.com.au.
- **SMART COVER** from Allianz: 1300 66 90 90.
- **ST GEORGE BANK** from CGU: 13 35 55; www.stgeorge.com.au.
- **STA** from QBE: 1300 555 017; www.statravel.com.au.
- **SURESAVE HOLIDAY** from Allianz: 1300 787 311; www.suresave.net.au.
- **WORLD CARE ASSIST** from Allianz: 13 14 84; www.worldcare.com.au.

ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES††

COVER LIMITS

Bungee jumping	Motorcycling	Hiking	Riding	Scuba diving	Skiing	White-water rafting	Car hire (collision damage excess waiver)	Cancellation (\$)	Personal liability (\$)	Baggage (\$)	Medical (\$)
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			15,000 (G)	2,000,000	25,000 (J)	1,000,000
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited	2,500,000	20,000	Unlimited
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓ (F)	Unlimited	2,500,000	20,000	Unlimited
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Unlimited (H)	2,500,000	20,000	Unlimited (K)
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓ (F)	Unlimited	2,500,000	20,000	Unlimited

cancellation cover, are underwritten by Lloyds, travel and luggage delay by ACE.

(E) Only available for cardholders under 60.

(F) All waivers offered by the rental company — even discretionary ones — must be taken up first.

(G) Additional \$15,000 cover can be purchased for \$4 per \$1000 of cover.

(H) Only \$5000 cover for cardholders over 75.

(J) Additional \$25,000 cover can be purchased for \$3.50 per \$1000 of cover.

(K) Not covered for cardholders over 75.

Please note: The table provides only a summary of travel insurance cover — always contact the insurer and get a policy brochure to check which conditions and exclusions apply. For more information see Free cover with your credit card (page 22) and Tips and traps (above). Cards included are only scored on the quality of travel insurance they offer; they usually include a range of other benefits, such as extended warranties and rewards programs. See How we scored, page 23.

PROBLEMS WITH YOUR INSURER?

If you have problems with a claim or need information about travel insurance, contact the General Insurance Enquiries and Complaints Scheme (IEC) on 1300 788 088 or go to www.iecltd.com.au.

Sparkling clean

Dishing the dirt on bathroom cleaners.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **White King** was the clear winner of the 16 products trialled — and it's also one of the cheapest.

■ If you're more concerned about smell, ease of use and not irritating your eyes, nose or throat, go for **Orange Power**.

■ Antibacterial cleaners aren't necessary to keep your family healthy — see far right for more.

There's a lot of bathroom cleaners in the supermarket, making plenty of claims. We picked 16 that said they removed both mould and soap scum — as these are the most common bathroom problems — and asked our Home Testers to try them out for us. It may not surprise you that it's not easy to find one that cleans well without knocking you out with the fumes.

Two products stood out as causing more eye, nose or throat irritation than the rest: **EXIT MOULD** and **BLACK & GOLD Shower Cleaner**. A third of our trialists complained of minor eye irritation and 55% of minor nose irritation with **EXIT MOULD**; 46% had minor nose irritation with **BLACK & GOLD**; and around 30% noted minor throat irritation with both products.

CHECK FIRST

If you're using a cleaner for the first time, it's wise to test it on an inconspicuous area first. That way you won't be in for any nasty surprises if it reacts with a surface in your bathroom.

Brand (in rank order)

WHITE KING Bleach Power Bathroom Gel Lemon

DOMESTOS Powerful Cleaner (A)

SELLEYS RMK Rapid Mould Killer

ORANGE POWER Shower, Bath & Tile Cleaner

SHOWER POWER

AJAX Powerful Bathroom Gel Lemon

AJAX Shower, Bath & Tiles Anti-Bacterial

DUCK for Bathrooms

CITRO CLEAN Multi-purpose Cleaner

PINEOCLEEN Basin Bath & Tile Anti-Bacterial

PINEOCLEEN Bathroom Power Foam Anti-Bacterial Lemon Blossom

■ **HURRICANE** Bathroom Gel Citrus Fresh

AUSTRALIAN EARTH Liquid Cleaning Gel Lemon Fresh

EXIT MOULD

HOME BRAND Mould Destroyer

BLACK & GOLD Shower Cleaner

The trial

Each of the 155 Home Testers who took part tried three different bathroom cleaners. They cleaned their bathroom in the normal way at the start of the trial, then after a week without cleaning they used one of the cleaners we'd sent them. After another week they used the next cleaner, and so on. Around 25 people tried each brand. Although we usually try to disguise brand names, it wasn't possible in this case as the labels contain both instructions for use and safety information.

CHOICE
HOME
TESTER

* Based on the price we paid in April 2003. Not all products are available in 500 mL, but it gives a direct price comparison.

(A) Doesn't claim to remove soap scum, only mould, but we included it because it's a popular bathroom cleaner. In fact it works better on soap scum than most of the other cleaners tested.

Are antibacterial cleaners necessary?

If you believe the marketing hype, your family's not safe from germs unless you use antibacterial products to eliminate bacteria from every surface in your home. The reality is that many microbiologists think the growing number and use of antibacterial products is adding to increased antibiotic resistance and the possible emergence of 'super' bugs.

Bacteria are all around us, and they're not all bad for us. We have an immune system for a reason, and to build up immunity to the bacteria that are harmful we need to have some exposure to them.

In addition, by mutation and natural selection bugs can develop resistance to any antibacterial products they're exposed to. In fact, a recent study in the US found that households that used antibacterial products had the same amount and kinds of bacteria as those that didn't.

Following good hygiene practices is more important for controlling bacteria-related illness in your home. Washing and drying your hands properly and often — but especially after going to the toilet, before preparing food and after playing with a pet — is one of the simplest but most effective steps you can take. And ordinary soap is perfectly adequate.

For more information go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'food safety quiz — Dec 01' in the A-Z index.



What to buy

Prices are based on what we paid in April 2003. The table gives prices per 500 mL for all products tested in order to give a useful comparison.

BEST CLEANER

WHITE KING BLEACH POWER BATHROOM GEL LEMON

Price: \$2.98 for 750 mL

WHITE KING was the most effective at removing both soap scum and mould, and at keeping mould at bay for a week. It's also one of the cheapest products in the trial and scored well for ease of use. Its main disadvantage is a strong bleach smell that our trialists disliked, so make sure your bathroom is well ventilated while you clean.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Mould came off with the sponge — I didn't need to scrub."

"Tiles and grouting came up very clean."



MOST PLEASANT TO USE

ORANGE POWER SHOWER, BATH & TILE CLEANER

Price: \$4.95 for 750 mL

This is the pick of the cleaners if you're sensitive to strong cleaning fumes or throat or eye irritation. It was by far the most popular for smell, being described as having a nice, sweet citrus smell. It removes soap scum with little effort and is easy to use, but is less effective on mould, which may not be a problem in well-ventilated bathrooms or in dry (for both weather and humidity) parts of the country.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Pleasant orange smell."

"I would need to clean regularly so mould doesn't accumulate."



Overall score (%)	Mould removal score (%)	Soap scum removal score (%)	Smell score (%)	Convenience / ease of use score (%)	Pack type	Product type	Price per 500 mL (\$)*
78	79	37	78	78	Pour, detachable lid	Gel	1.99
71	73	27	77	77	Pour, detachable lid	Gel	3.18
73	64	29	74	74	Trigger spray	Liquid	3.76
45	66	82	84	84	Trigger spray	Liquid	3.30
53	68	53	75	75	Trigger spray	Liquid	5.49
67	73	42	57	57	Pour, flip-top lid	Gel	3.60
41	70	53	85	85	Trigger spray	Liquid	3.05
47	68	65	78	78	Trigger spray	Liquid	2.83
51	63	60	64	64	Pump spray	Liquid	7.05
48	63	69	81	81	Trigger spray	Liquid	3.75
45	66	68	57	57	Aerosol can	Foam	5.14
55	61	47	63	63	Pour, flip-top lid	Gel	2.05
52	60	44	58	58	Pour, flip-top lid	Gel	1.54
66	56	11	80	80	Trigger spray	Liquid	5.57
57	44	22	73	73	Trigger spray	Liquid	1.55
36	44	14	69	69	Trigger spray	Liquid	1.19

Overall score

To come up with this score, trialists considered each cleaner overall, taking into account effectiveness at removing mould and soap scum, including the cleaning effort required; smell; prevention of mould and soap scum reappearance; ease of application; and eye, nose and throat irritation. It's not derived from a combination of the other scores in the table.

Sold by: OWNER

If you ever considered selling your home without a real estate agent but didn't know where to start, here's the lowdown on what's involved.

IN A NUTSHELL

- *Selling your house yourself could save you thousands of dollars in agent's commission, but you need some time and aptitude for the job.*
- *Good preparation and knowledge of the market is essential for a successful sale.*
- *Lots of websites offer services for vendors, ranging from free Internet listings to comprehensive packages with professional selling tools — see Need a little help?, page 32.*

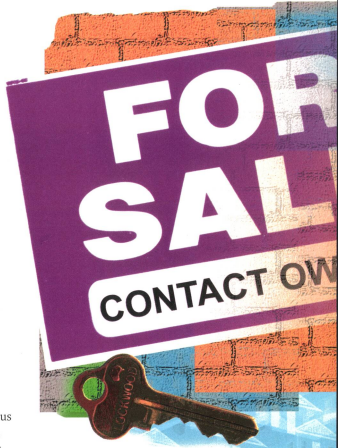
For many people, selling a home is a major event. First of all you want to achieve the best price you can get for your property, plus if you've already exchanged contracts on a new place, failing to sell your old one can have far-reaching effects. So the whole process needs careful planning, organisation and know-how to complete the transactions successfully.

Because there's quite a lot of money at stake, most people in Australia entrust the sale of their home to the experts: real estate agents. But if the first responses to our recent reader survey on consumer satisfaction with real estate agents are anything to go by, engaging an agent to sell your home doesn't always mean plain sailing. Early next year we'll report in detail on the survey. In the meantime, here are the main points you need to consider if you want to take the plunge and sell your home yourself.

CUTTING OUT THE MIDDLEMAN

Saving the agent's commission is probably the main reason some people opt to go it alone when selling their home. Considering it's usually between 1% and 3% of the sale price, it can amount to thousands of dollars.

Selling your home yourself can also put you in greater control of the process. You get instant feedback on the level of interest it attracts, and you alone are dealing with prospective buyers and are making decisions without third-party pressure. And finally, there's the marketing advantage you can bring to the process. As the owner, you probably know best all the good things others should know about your home.



But selling a house or unit, which for many people is their most valuable asset, isn't a job everyone can do easily. You need to be well organised, experienced or at least confident in negotiating and able to stay calm and composed in stressful situations.

And you need to be able to spend some time on the process, both before and during the sale period. Early on in the process you need time to get your home and a contract ready, and for your 'homework'. Unless you're very familiar with real estate trends in your area, you need to familiarise yourself with the market, so you can negotiate from a position of knowledge. Then, during the process, you need time for inspections and follow-up work.

Last but not least, you mustn't shy away from making decisions, decisions and more decisions.

FIRST THERE'S WHEN TO SELL ...

If there's no urgency with your sale and you're planning ahead, the season when you put your house on the market could make a difference. Australians generally like to sell their homes in spring or early summer, when gardens look nice and sunshine brightens up the interior. The long January holiday can make moving a bit easier, as is a change of school at the beginning of a school year.

But winter sales can have their advantages, too. There's generally less competition even in a buyers'



ILLUSTRATIONS: SIMON BUSCH

market (when many properties are up for sale). And if your home has the right aspect and captures lots of winter sunlight, its passive solar design can be a good selling point. If it doesn't, make sure the house is light, warm and cosy when prospective buyers inspect it.

... THEN HOW ...

Will you sell your house by private treaty or auction? Both methods have their advantages. (A third, more informal method — by tender or expression of interest — is usually employed for gauging interest in higher-value properties.)

■ **Private treaty.** Your property has an asking price and is sold by negotiation. You'd usually advertise your home and deal with interested buyers in private.

Selling by private treaty gives you time to consider offers and negotiate with prospective buyers. It's generally a less dramatic type of sale than one by auction with all its associated pressures.

■ **Public auction.** Your property is auctioned in public and sold to the highest bidder when the reserve price (that you set and disclose only to the auctioneer) has been reached or exceeded.

Auction sales are generally recommended for homes with special appeal that are difficult to price — a beautiful location, for example, or a particularly appealing type of house.

The main advantages of selling by auction include getting the best price (possibly exceeding your reserve price) within a set time frame and securing the deal on auction day (buyers can't negotiate terms in the contract and have to pay a generally non-refundable deposit on the day). However, if the sale is unsuccessful at auction, you'll still have to pay the auctioneer.

Conducting an auction requires specialised skills, and even those in the business of helping people sell their home by themselves highly recommend hiring an auctioneer for the job. It's too important an event to conduct yourself if you're inexperienced.

The Real Estate Institute in your state may be able to help you find an independent auctioneer with appropriate knowledge of property sales in your area and a good clearance rate. Make sure you mention, though, that you're looking for one who'll do a private sale.

The fee for an auctioneer to hold an auction varies, depending on what's involved. It could be just a few hundred dollars to around a thousand or more, depending on what level of assistance you need.

If you decide on a sale by auction, allow sufficient time for advertising. You'll want to reach as many prospective buyers as possible and they'll need a little time to check out the contract and have building and/or pest inspections done before the



auCTION. Also, with a little time up your sleeve before auction day, you may want to consider early offers.

If your house doesn't reach the reserve price at auction and you still want to sell, you could start negotiations with the highest bidders on price and conditions.

... THE PRICE ...

Setting a realistic asking or reserve price for your property requires some knowledge of the real estate market in general, recent sales in your neighbourhood and, last but not least, a degree of objectivity.

In a strong buyers' market with dropping house prices and slow-selling properties, getting the price right is particularly important. If it's too high, potential buyers mightn't even bother to check the house out. On the other hand, you may get away with a slightly inflated sale price in a sellers' market, when demand is high, house prices are going up and properties sell quickly.

To get a feel for your local property market, study the 'for sale' ads in your local newspapers and real estate agents' windows. It's also worth checking out internet sites that offer properties for sale (see *Need a little help?*, page 32, for some addresses). And you can get a guide that lists recent sale data by suburb — it's sold by some newspapers and real estate services such as online property sites or property valuers.

Look at as many houses as possible when they're up for sale or auction in your neighbourhood. Take

notes of what you see and the expected sale prices and then compare what you've seen elsewhere to your own home. Try to look at it like a buyer and ask yourself how much you'd pay for it, considering its location, size, age, condition, style and special features.

The price, or price range, that you come up with should reflect the market value of your home and be attractive to prospective buyers. Considering that many buyers see the asking price as a basis for negotiation, set it a little higher than you expect to get so you can negotiate.

If you want to take advantage of a local real estate agent's free appraisal of your property, keep in mind that it's not a valuation but the agent's opinion, based on their understanding of the market and a review of similar properties they sold recently in your area.

To test the price range you've come up with, you might want to hire an independent valuer. The Australian Property Institute in your state can help you find an appropriate valuer with experience in your local area.

For an average, standard house, a short and simple valuation can cost as little as \$200; around \$800–\$1000 should get you a more comprehensive one that includes a list of relevant sales in your area. A valuation of a high-value property may incur a higher fee.

... AND THE CONTRACT

Depending on which state you live in, you may need a contract ready before you can advertise your home for sale. You may also need to provide some conveyancing information specific to your property, such as a drainage diagram or zoning certificate, or a vendor statement, statement of disclosure and so on. Conveyancing is the legal process of transferring ownership of property from one person to another.

If you have the time, aptitude and are prepared to pay a lot of attention to detail, you can draw up a contract yourself and carry out the required property searches, perhaps with the help of a conveyancing kit. (If you opt for a DIY conveyancing kit, look at it before you buy it. When we reviewed some a few years ago, we found a few that were very hard to use and to understand.)

However, selling your home can be a stressful time, and if you'd rather not worry about the legal side as well, you'll probably hire a lawyer (or a conveyancer, in most states) to look after the contract and conveyancing requirements. The costs for this service for a standard residential property range from around \$400 to \$1000, depending on who you contract and the amount of work to be done.

If you can't find a professional experienced in property transactions and conveyancing through personal recommendations, contact the Law Society/Institute or Institute of Conveyancers in your state or territory.

GETTING THE HOUSE READY

Given our national obsession with renovating and property transactions, it's perhaps not surprising there's such a wide range of TV shows and magazines offering help to DIY renovators and home vendors. So we'll just mention the most important things here that may need attention: 'de-cluttering' your home and creating a good first impression.

As you may not be able to recoup the costs of expensive renovation work when you sell, it's probably best to ask an independent valuer for advice before you embark on costly projects. But a thorough clean-up and 'de-cluttering', both inside and outside, and a simple touch-up makeover where it's really needed can be quite effective in attracting buyers and adding value to your home.

Obviously your home and property should be immaculately clean and tidy and all fixtures in working order. Pay particular attention to the areas people see first (the nature strip, front yard, outside of your house, steps, entrance door and hallway) — flaking paint, overgrown gardens or torn flyscreens may turn prospective buyers away before they've even seen the house.

Inside everything should also be spotless and tidy, with as many non-essential items (excess furniture or clutter) as possible removed to promote space where interested buyers can imagine themselves and their belongings. Put your excess things into storage or store them at a friend's place — don't stuff them into cupboards that people might open.

If you're opting for more elaborate marketing, you might even want to hire a professional stylist to give your home a makeover (or get their advice on what you can do yourself), or hire some new furniture to complement the style of the home. If you've got the money to spend, your options are more or less unlimited.

MARKETING

Your decision on how extensively to market your home will also depend largely on your budget. Marketing will influence the number and type of buyers you attract and with that, of course, the sale price. Marketing costs can range from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands, and they're usually a separate expense, even if you contract a real estate agent to sell the house.

If you're tied to a tight budget, you may just opt

for the very basics: a few ads in local, metropolitan and/or state dailies backed up with a free internet listing (see *Need a little help?*, for more on this). You could also put up a signboard in your front yard to attract passers-by, and prepare brochures and/or factsheets for interested buyers who inspect the house. If you need help with these, check out the companies listed in *Need a little help?*. Some provide a complete package that includes many useful marketing tools.

If you have the money you might decide that spending more on other marketing tools (such as professional photography, professional styling, advertising in glossy magazines or enhanced internet listings) could well pay off, especially if you're competing with many other properties for sale in your area, or your house has special appeal.

INSPECTIONS

In your marketing material you can either invite interested buyers to inspect your home by appointment (which could be very time-

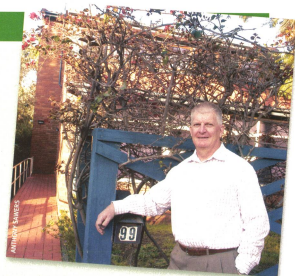
DIY BY DEFAULT

Norm, one of CHOICE's staff members, sold his house himself in the mid 1990s, though he hadn't planned to go it alone from the outset. He'd engaged a real estate agent to sell the house, but when it was passed in at auction and the agent failed to sell it afterwards, he took the sale upon himself — with good results.

"After all the advertising and marketing, only one buyer turned up for the auction, and their offer didn't come anywhere near the reserve price," says Norm. His real estate agent kept the house on his books, but brought no interested buyers around for the month following the auction.

After that, when the exclusive-agency agreement had expired, Norm simply put his own name and contact numbers on top of the agents' on the signboard in his front yard and hoped for the best. About a week later an interested passer-by dropped in and made an offer. After a short negotiation period, they agreed on a purchase price and clinched the deal.

Would he do it again this way, or recommend a DIY house sale to a friend? "Yes, definitely. This time the marketing had been taken care of by the agent (though I paid for it, around \$3500). Next time I'll get a DIY kit, because it's important to have a professional-looking signboard and other advertising material," says Norm.



Need a little help?

Various websites have sprung up in recent years offering help and services for people wanting to sell property without an agent. They offer basic property listings (sometimes free), charge a fee for enhanced listings or additional services, or offer comprehensive packages with professional selling tools to help you through the process. Some examples are listed below. Prices quoted were current at the time of research but could be subject to change.

- www.australiarealty.com (listings start from \$125).
- www.dwell.com.au (Queensland; listings start from \$100).
- www.fsbo.com.au (Sydney; basic listing only for \$132 or a package for \$1395, which includes a manual, market analysis, checklists, signboard, brochures, factsheets, back-up service and home loan and insurance brokerage).
- www.homemate.com.au (Queensland; listings start from \$120).
- www.houses.ontheinternet.com.au (listings start from \$187, also free text-only listings).
- www.owner.com.au (Sydney; free listings and additional services for a fee).
- www.privatesale.com.au (free listings).
- www.privatesaleco.com.au (Tasmania; marketing system for a fixed service fee, usually about 10–20% of an agent's fee).
- www.selfsell.com.au (Victoria; package includes market appraisals, signboard, brochures, manual, back-up service and other help; costs: \$1545 for a private treaty sale, \$1890 for an auction sale).
- www.yourestate.com.au (free listings).

It's also worthwhile checking the websites of the fair trading body and real estate institute in your state, which may have useful information to help you understand the selling process.

consuming), or stipulate certain times when it's open for inspection, usually once or twice a week for up to an hour. If natural light makes a big difference inside your home at certain times, take advantage of that when you organise inspection times.

With the telephone number(s) in your marketing material, make sure you or somebody else is able to answer the phone or an answering machine is on — people don't want to keep phoning to contact you.

On inspection day, have copies of the contract ready for interested people, as well as any additional marketing material you want to provide. As people come in, ask them for their name and contact number so you can follow up later.

Outside inspection hours allow some extra time for really interested people who want to come back, say with a spouse, relative or builder, or for pest and/or building inspections they might want to arrange.

NEGOTIATIONS

If you get a good number of interested people in on inspection days, chances are you might soon be starting negotiations with one or more of them. It's best not to get drawn into price negotiations during inspection times, when you should concentrate on keeping records and an eye on visitors. If you get an offer there and then, ask them to put it in writing so you can consider it later.

When prospective buyers make offers, staying emotionally detached can be the hardest part of the process if you aren't used to negotiating. Many people like to bargain for the best price, so it's probably best not to accept a first offer, as it's likely to be less than the interested buyer is prepared to pay.

Keep all potential buyers 'in the loop' until you've exchanged contracts. Tell them if you've had a higher offer than theirs — they may want to increase it.

EXCHANGING CONTRACTS

When you've finally agreed on the price and all conditions, the buyer will usually pay a deposit. Your contract should stipulate where the money is to be invested and whether interest is to be shared.

Depending on your state legislation, the buyer may have a cooling-off period during which they can withdraw from the contract. In that case, you can deduct a small percentage of the purchase price from the deposit. A cooling-off period doesn't apply to an auction sale.

The full purchase price (adjusted for things like water and council rates that you've paid in advance) is due on settlement day, when you (and/or your representative) and your mortgage provider, if applicable, will meet the equivalent buyer's party to finalise the sale and transfer the keys to the new owner.



Improvements all round on the 68 cm TV front: their sound's getting better, they now have a truly flat screen and, best of all, they're getting cheaper.



Big moves for big TVs

There are big moves going on in the big TV market. Prices have dropped a fair bit over the last year (the cheapest models in our November 2002 test were \$1099, the most expensive \$1799). Flat screens have become standard, sound has improved a little and there are some encouraging signs of user-friendliness in the design of some sets and some remotes.

So why have big-screen TVs become cheaper? It's probably because flat screens are now the norm, with manufacturers no longer able to ask a premium price for them. Increased production volumes would also have contributed to the price drop, as would the fact that 68 cm (29 inch) TVs are in fact no longer really considered 'big-screen'. Check the ads — the 'big TVs' that are now getting all the attention are wide-screen models, plasma screens and home projection systems. Think many thousands of dollars.

In contrast, the models in our test sell for \$700 to \$1500. Which means, if you want a decent TV-watching experience without spending a fortune, some of the models discussed here could be just what you're looking for.

ADJUSTING A BRAND-NEW TV

A brand-new TV may not come correctly adjusted from the factory. Our testers noted that the sets were delivered with settings that were nowhere near realistic. They had too much contrast, colour and sharpness. Unfortunately, test patterns are no longer broadcast, so here's how to set up your new TV.

Picture

Choose a local channel with preferably a well-lit outdoor scene. Turn the colour control right back so you have a black and white picture.

Adjust the contrast and brightness to get the best-looking black and white picture possible. Look for a smooth series of greys between the full black and the full white. Contrast adjusts the difference between black and white, while brightness adjusts the overall picture brightness. Too much contrast will make the picture look all black and white with no greys, and too much brightness will make black into grey. Start adjusting with both controls at their mid-point.

Change the channel to a newsreader. Slowly bring in the colour until the skin tones look natural.

The sharpness control was introduced to aid VHS tape replay quality. It's misnamed, has nothing to do with the picture focus and is not useful for normal broadcast or DVD viewing. Keep it toward the lower end of its range.

Sound

Experiment with the controls to get the best sound you can. Start with on/off controls like bass boost set to off, and variable controls like bass and treble set to the mid-point. Make small adjustments one control at a time. The idea is to 'home in' on the best setting for you.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: nine 68 cm flat-screen TVs ranging in price from \$700–\$1500.

■ Prices for this size of TV have fallen in the past year. So if you want a decent TV-watching experience without spending a fortune, one of our Best Buys (see below) could be just what you're looking for.

WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC TX68P572A	\$1399
SONY KV-XJ29M31	\$1399
TOSHIBA 29VZ6DA	\$1499
LG RT-29FA33RQ	\$999
SAMSUNG CS29K3	\$999

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in July/August 2003.

PANASONIC TX68PS72A

Price: \$1399

Good points

- Good picture and best sound.
- Graphic equaliser for sound adjustment.
- Front and rear S-video inputs.

Bad points

- Remote control the hardest to use.



SONY KV-J29M31

Price: \$1399

Good points

- Best picture and good sound.
- Good remote control.
- Low standby energy consumption.

Bad points

- Poor onscreen menu structure.
- Fewer features than some other models.



TOSHIBA 29V6DA

Price: \$1499

Good points

- Good picture and very good sound.
- Good remote control.
- Good onscreen displays.

Bad points

- Fewer features than some other models.
- The most expensive in the test.



LG RT-29FA33RQ

Price: \$999

Good points

- Good picture and sound.
- Very easy to use, with the best remote.
- Good onscreen displays.
- Graphic equaliser for sound adjustment.
- Impressive range of features.

Bad points

- Standby power consumption not so good.

BEST BUY



SAMSUNG CS29K3

Price: \$999

Good points

- Good picture.
- Very easy to use.
- Well-labelled and balanced remote and easy-to-navigate onscreen display.
- Graphic equaliser for sound adjustment.
- Impressive range of features.

Bad points

- No teletext.

BEST BUY



PROFILES: CONSUMER

What to look for

Picture

- Compare several sets in the shop. Look for good skin tones and complex landscapes with visible, focused detail.
- Check the adjustments. If any of the picture settings are on maximum, you'll have no scope for improvements if picture quality declines in the future.

Sound

- TVs, even big ones, don't usually have good sound. Still, it's worth asking for a demo in the shop — our test shows there are still quite major differences between models. The reviewing panel found the poorer models sounded tinny and lacked bass, and even the better models are nowhere near hifi standard. We don't rate sound for hifi/stereo systems and TVs on the same scale, but as a comparison, a \$250 or so mini-stereo system would score around 100% in our TV sound rating.
- Many big TVs have features designed so you can adjust the sound to your preference, such as bass and treble controls, graphic equaliser and a bass booster. But if you want better sound, you have two choices: buy a home theatre system with separate speakers, or run a cable from your TV sound output to the 'aux' input of a decent stereo. The sound output signal from these TV sets is of good quality, so playing a TV through a stereo gives you a big improvement.

Screen

- Flat screens are now the norm for big TVs, and for most others. They don't improve the picture, but they do cut down the reflected glare from windows or lights, and allow a wider viewing angle.

What about the rest?

- The SHARP lacks some useful features and, with the RCA, ranked bottom for sound.
- The PHILIPS has a good range of features, but was comparatively disappointing in all tests except standby energy use.
- At \$699, the TEAC was the cheapest model on test, but it scored relatively low for both picture and sound quality.
- The RCA ranked bottom or close to it in most categories.

Remote control

■ A good remote is comfortable to hold. It has buttons clearly labelled with words, not code or abbreviations. The buttons are grouped according to function, and may be colour-coded and/or shape-coded to help with this. They're big enough to push easily, and you have quick access to all the functions you commonly use. (See the photo, below right.)

■ A new user (a babysitter or grandparents, say) should be able to use the remote without having to find the manual.

■ Check it out in the shop. Can you colour-correct the picture? Set the TV to play via your VCR, DVD and game console? Adjust the aspect ratio (shape of the picture) so you can watch a wide-screen movie?

■ In our test, the LG had the best remote, and those of the RCA, SHARP, SONY and TOSHIBA were pretty good too.

Front panel controls

■ Fashionable TV design has very few controls on the front of the set. But what happens when you can't find the remote? We really liked the SHARP's approach — it has the controls on a sloping panel at the top of the set. Now that's real ease of use.

Onscreen displays

■ As with remotes, look for a set with displays you understand.

■ The LG and TOSHIBA have the best displays in this test. The RCA, on the other hand, has no text labels for its functions, only symbols. The SONY isn't much better. It has no menu structure — you have to step through all functions in turn by pressing the 'select' button.

Input/output sockets

■ Look for good range of connections, front and rear. As an example, if you own or are thinking of buying a digital video camera, an S-video socket at the front of the set will make it much quicker and easier to connect up and watch your videos at the best quality possible. See *Connecting your TV*, page 36, for more. The table overleaf notes which models have which connections.

Instruction manual

■ The simple check-it-out rule applies. Try a few sample pages. If you can't understand them, find another set.

Features

All TVs in this test have rear AV inputs, are cable TV-compatible and come with a remote control. All (or most of them) also have the following features:

■ **Off timer** (except the TOSHIBA): Switches the TV off automatically at a preset time or after a preset period.

■ **On timer** (except the RCA): Switches the TV on automatically at a preset time or after a preset period.

■ **Automatic tuning**: Searches for and tunes to all the available TV broadcasts in the area.

■ **Channel skip**: Lets you remove unassigned and unwanted channels temporarily, so they're bypassed when selecting channels with the up and down keys.

■ **Teletext** (except the SAMSUNG and TEAC): Lets you receive, decode and display onscreen text information like the weather, time, TV guide and event announcements.

Other useful features (the table notes which models have them) include:

■ **Channel rearrange**: Lets you change the auto-tune channel order.

■ **Station naming**: Allows you to choose a three or four-character name for each channel and the AV inputs.

■ **'Noise' reduction**: Option to reduce picture noise, or 'snow'.

■ **Zoom**: Increases the height of a wide-screen picture to fill the screen.

■ **16:9 compress**: Squashes the scan lines so a wide-screen (16:9) picture can be displayed on a conventional (4:3) TV. It creates a black stripe top and bottom of the picture (letterbox effect).

■ **Personal memory**: Lets you save and reuse the picture settings you prefer.

■ **Bass and treble**: Two separate controls.

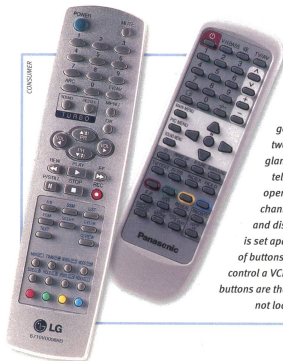
■ **Graphic equaliser**: Divides the sound into separately adjustable frequency bands.

■ **Pseudo surround**: For generating semi surround-sound effects.

■ **VCR functions**: Allows the remote control to operate a VCR of the same make as the TV.

■ **Auto off**: Switches the TV off automatically after a period of no signal.

■ **Child lock**: Locks the controls via the remote and so makes the front panel controls unworkable.



The differences between a good and a bad remote: these two might look similar at first glance, but the LG (far left) has teletext controls and can also operate a VCR. The volume and channel buttons are well placed and distinct, and the mute button is set apart. The Panasonic has lots of buttons the same size and doesn't control a VCR. The channel and volume buttons are the same size as the rest and not located in a distinct position.

PERFORMANCE

6 CONNECTIONS

7 FEATURES

Brand / model
(in rank order)

PANASONIC TX68P572A

SONY KV-XD29M31

TOSHIBA 29V26DA

LG RT-29FA33RQ

SAMSUNG CS29K3

SHARP SX68LF8

PHILIPS Powervision 29PT252

TEAC CTF687

RCA 29DF17EA

1 Overall score
(%)

2 Picture quality
score (%)

3 Sound quality
score (%)

4 Ease of use
score (%)

5 Standby
energy score (%)

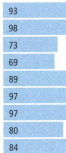
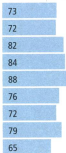
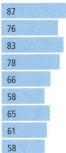
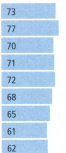
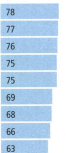
AV
Inputs

S-video
Inputs

Component
video
Inputs

Channel
rearrange

7 Features



Connecting your TV

These days large TVs like these are likely to be connected to lots of different inputs, some permanently and others for short durations. There are three different connection systems used in modern TVs, ranging from composite (lowest quality) through S-video to component.

■ **Component video (DVD input):** Separates the picture signal into brightness and two colour signals, and currently provides the best picture quality. Three video and two audio cables are required. Component video is fitted to many of the more expensive DVD players.

■ **S-video:** Identifiable by a small, round, four-pin plug, S-video provides slightly worse picture quality than component but better than composite, because the brightness and colour signals are still separate. Because S-video doesn't carry sound signals, separate audio cables are required. Some VCRs, camcorders and DVDs are equipped with S-video connectors.

■ **Composite (A/V):** All modern TVs have composite input. This is the original system for connecting VCRs, camcorders, games consoles, etc, to TVs. Composite video uses two (video and mono sound) or three (video and stereo sound) cables. The brightness and colour signals are combined into the single video signal.

Most TVs have a combination of several of these inputs. To get the best picture you should use the highest-quality interconnection possible. Here's how ...

■ A **VCR** is mostly connected permanently, so use the connectors at the rear of the TV. Use composite (A/V) connectors unless you have an S-VHS VCR, when you should use S-video. Cable TV is generally connected to the input of the VCR so that programs can be recorded.

■ A **DVD player** is also generally connected permanently, so use rear connectors. Use component video if the TV and DVD player have it, otherwise S-video. As a last resort you can use composite.

■ For a **camcorder** use the front connectors for convenience. Analogue camcorders and digital cameras generally use composite connectors, but if you have a digital camcorder the standard is S-video, which you should use if you can.

■ For **video games** use the front connectors for convenience. Use composite connectors or, if fitted to the console, S-video or component.

Note: As component and S-video carry picture-only information, you'll still need to connect audio cables for left and right (white and red) sound channels.

Component video

S-video

Composite video

										SPECIFICATIONS				
Use' duction	Zoom	16:9 compress	Personal memory	Bass & treble	Graphic equaliser	Pseudo surround	VCR functions	Auto off	Child lock	Dimensions (W x H x D, cm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$) **
		✓			✓	✓			✓	82 x 57 x 50	ns	Malaysia	Panasonic	1399
		✓		✓					✓	79 x 57 x 51	1	Malaysia	Sony	1399
			✓	✓						78 x 59 x 52	ns	Indonesia	Castel	1499
	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	79 x 58 x 50	1	South Korea	LG	999
	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	81 x 60 x 48	1	South Korea	Samsung	999
				✓						77 x 59 x 51	1	China	Sharp	999
	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	78 x 59 x 54	2	China	Philips	1149
			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	79 x 58 x 50	3	China	Teac	699
			✓	✓				✓	✓	76 x 61 x 51	1	Thailand	Thomson	999

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked a group of subscribers whether their TV (any, not just 68 cm models) had needed repair over the previous 12 months, and whether they'd buy the same brand again. The graphs below show the results for TVs of all sizes; the size doesn't seem to make a difference to reliability.

Analysis was limited to brands with more than 100 responses (the exact number is in brackets) and with at least 10 sets bought in each of the previous eight years.

Just 8% of TVs had needed repair in the previous 12 months, with subscribers reporting the following problems significantly more often than average for the following brands (for TVs up to three years old):

- Picture: AWA (23%), AKAI (12%), MITSUBISHI (12%), TEAC (11%).
- Sound : AWA (18%), PHILIPS (6%), TEAC (6%).
- Remote control: AKAI (10%), TEAC (7%).
- Tuner: AWA (9%), AKAI (4%).

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

(Differences of more than 6% are meaningful)

Panasonic/National (4334)	97
Sony (4546)	96
Sharp (1761)	94
Hitachi (285)	93
NEC (1795)	93
Sanyo (871)	93
JVC (418)	92
Mitsubishi (1029)	91
Philips (2034)	90
Samsung (1044)	88
LG/Goldstar (361)	87
Palsonic (506)	87
Akai (1345)	85
Toshiba (190)	85
AWA (260)	83
Blaupunkt (163)	83
Teac (1039)	80

PERCENTAGE WHO'D BUY THE SAME BRAND AGAIN

Panasonic/National (4363)	98
Sony (4607)	98
JVC (422)	95
Sanyo (888)	94
Sharp (1762)	94
Mitsubishi (1007)	93
Hitachi (285)	92
LG/Goldstar (361)	92
NEC (1810)	91
Philips (2039)	90
Toshiba (181)	87
Samsung (1045)	85
Akai (1341)	84
Blaupunkt (160)	84
AWA (251)	77
Palsonic (507)	77
Teac (1042)	75

* Rounded up to the next centimetre; all protruding parts except the cord included.

** Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in July/August 2003.

ns Not stated.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Picture quality: 50%
- Sound quality: 25%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Standby energy: 5%

2 Picture quality score

This is based on both a viewing (80%) and a technical picture pattern (20%) assessment.

3 Sound quality score

This is based on both a listening (80%) and a technical (20%) sound assessment.

4 Ease of use score

This covers the front panel controls, remote control, display/menu, ease of tuning and the user manual.

5 Standby energy score

This looks at the energy used when on standby (when the TV is turned off by the remote control but still connected to power). The lower the usage, the higher the score.

6 Connections

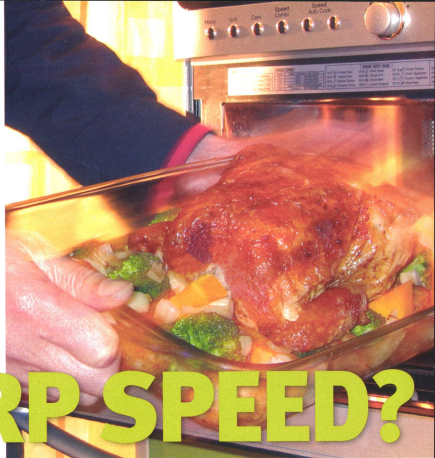
F = front; R = rear; S = side. See also *Connecting your TV*, far left.

7 Features

See *Features*, page 35, for an explanation of the features in the table.

The latest oven technology — is it really cooking with light?

Cooking at WARP SPEED?



IN A NUTSHELL

I The LG SolarDom cooks well and is as versatile as any other combination convection/grill/microwave oven, but you're paying a lot of money for a halogen light.

If you believed the LG SolarDom Light Oven commercials and promos, you'd be thinking this oven could cook at the speed of light, using just light.

Not quite. We bought one to see what the fuss was about and weren't too surprised to discover that it's just an ordinary combination convection/grill/microwave oven with the addition of a halogen lamp. Contrary to what the advertising implies, this oven doesn't cook with just the halogen light — its main

purpose is to assist browning and heating on some preset functions only.

Just like a typical combination oven, you can use it as microwave, convection oven or grill only plus in a combination of modes, depending on what you're cooking.

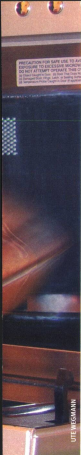
The advantage of any combination microwave oven is its versatility. You can cook or reheat pastry, biscuits, dough, etc, that you wouldn't normally put into a standard microwave. It cooks faster than a conventional oven and browns at the same time. Your kitchen doesn't get as hot, and you save energy and money because of the faster, more efficient cooking. All this applies to the LG SolarDom.

HOW WELL DOES IT COOK?

We did 12 tests in several cooking modes: we defrosted mince and whole chickens, reheated frozen pizza and a typical meal on a plate, cooked broccoli, roasted a whole chicken, grilled sausages and toast, and baked a custard tart, scones, meringues and sponge cake.

We followed the manufacturer's instructions, and on the whole it cooked very well. Exceptions were auto-reheating a pizza, which produced a base that wasn't brown and crisp enough, the custard tart (the skin was curdled) and tough sausage skin. However, you can improve all these results with some trial and error by adjusting time,





power and/or temperature, or in the case of the pizza by simply preheating the oven.

The toast cooked under the grill was unevenly browned, showing that the oven can't evenly brown foods at high temperatures in a short time.

COOKING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT?

LG says the **SolarDom** can cook up to four times faster than a conventional oven. To check the claim we roasted chickens in various combinations of cooking modes. The fastest took 37 minutes — about twice as fast as normal convection cooking.

We also baked potatoes, enough for two people, and they cooked in less than 15 minutes using the 'speed auto' function. It would take about 40 minutes in a conventional oven. But as with any microwave, the more potatoes you cook in the **SolarDom**, the more time it will take. No matter what quantity you cook in a conventional oven, the time will be the same.

So four times as fast? Perhaps, when cooking very small servings of some foods, but with most foods it's unlikely. But certainly faster than a conventional oven.

HEALTHIER COOKING?

LG claims food cooked in the **SolarDom** is healthier because it cooks faster at higher temperatures and contains less fat and cholesterol and more protein and carbohydrates than food cooked in a conventional oven.

This is nonsense. Deep-frying aside, the way meat's cooked will have minimal impact on its fat and cholesterol levels, and cooking certainly can't increase the amount of protein and carbohydrate. Vegetables, though, are generally better microwaved or steamed as fewer nutrients are lost.

THE VERDICT

It cooks well and is easy to use, and like combination convection/grill/microwave ovens in general, it's versatile in its cooking modes, but it's small and you lose the flexibility of multi-shelf cooking that you get in a conventional oven. Some people might find it adequate as their only oven, though it's probably not big enough for family cooking.

At a recommended price of \$1599, it's pricey. Normal convection/grill/microwave ovens cost around \$1000 or less, so you're paying at least an extra \$600 for the halogen feature. Given the high price, we were disappointed it didn't have some of the other useful features available on some combination microwaves, such as sensor cooking and/or reheating. Although the halogen light makes browning a little quicker, its use is otherwise limited, so you're paying a lot of money for what's essentially a gimmick. ■

MORE COSTS

The **LG SolarDom** can be built in or placed on a benchtop, but requires a dedicated 15 amp power outlet, which must be installed by a licensed electrician if you don't already have one.

The halogen lamp (claimed to last 10 years, depending on how often it's in use) also has to be replaced by a service person. It'll cost \$35 for a replacement, plus \$50 for the service — if you take it to the service centre yourself. Otherwise you'll be charged an extra \$25 for pick-up.

Hot 'n' steamy

There's another novel kind of oven available that we suspect will have a limited market: the **BRANDT BSU361X** steam oven. If you prefer steamed food but don't like microwaves and have \$2600 to spare, it could be just the thing for you.

It's about half the size of a conventional oven, and needs to be built into your kitchen. It works on one temperature only, 100°C, so all you have to do is set the timer and fill the tank with water before each use.

Following the manufacturer's instructions, we cooked chicken breast fillets, salmon fillets, salmon fillets with vegetables julienne, broccoli and crème caramel, and heated frozen lasagne.

The results were very good except for the combined fish and vegetables — the vegetables were a bit overcooked. But you could correct this with a bit of trial and error.

The steam oven isn't capable of browning foods, so if you like your meat brown you'll need to grill or fry it before or after steaming.

The verdict: There are cheaper ways of steaming food.



Country Dwellers' Mobile Alternative?



The CDMA mobile phone network is supposed to be the system to choose if you use your mobile a lot outside metropolitan areas. But which handset should you get?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Overall, there's not all that much difference between the seven CDMA phones we tested. However, the top two stood out for sensitivity (ability to pick up a signal) and should be your choice if you use your phone a lot in areas with a poor signal.

■ Otherwise just pick the one with the features and functions you want that's available on the best plan for your needs.

We've been publishing test results on digital GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) phones for several years. This is the first time we've looked at handsets you can use in the CDMA (Code Divisional Multiple Access) network — the digital network that replaced the old analogue one a few years ago.

There are two CDMA network providers in Australia:

- Telstra runs the main network, promising twice the coverage area of its GSM network.
- Orange covers major cities, and uses the Telstra network elsewhere.

GSM is the recommended system if you live or mainly use your mobile within capital cities and metropolitan areas (particularly inside buildings), or if you want to use it overseas. CDMA offers better coverage than GSM outside cities, but you won't be able to use your phone in other countries.

All the network operators (Optus, Telstra and Vodafone for GSM; Orange and Telstra for CDMA) have coverage maps available either from their retail outlets or on their websites (see *More info*, page 42).

Compare the coverage for your area before you decide on a system or network.

WHAT WE FOUND

- The biggest differences between models were in our **sensitivity** test using a railway tunnel (see note 2, page 43). The two top models were able to maintain a connection made outside the tunnel for two to three times the distance into the tunnel the other models managed. So if you use your phone a lot in weak signal areas, one of the KYOCERAs is for you.
- While we found considerable differences between the phones' **battery** lives, even the models with the shortest were able to make more than 30 four-minute calls over 4–5 days. So if you use your phone less than that, you'll probably have to recharge them only about once a week.
- Our user panel didn't find much between the models' **sound quality**, and background noise had a similarly big impact on all of them.
- The phones' everyday functions are all relatively **easy to use**, and their menus are reasonably intuitive. The main criticism our trialists had was



What to look for

Features in the table (page 42)

- **Voice dialling:** Allows you to record a word (for example, the name of a person) together with a phone number, and to dial the number by saying the word.
- **Voice recording:** Allows you to record voice memos or reminders.
- **All the tested phones have at least 25 ring tones.** Unlike the one-tone ring you're used to from older phones, the two **SAMSUNG** models have polyphonic ring melodies made up from several tones, which sounds more like music.
- **Calendar/scheduler:** Allows you to manage your appointments.

Features and functions most have

- **Vibration alarm:** You can set the phone to vibrate instead of ring — useful if you need to have your phone on while you're in a meeting or restaurant, where a ringing phone would bother others.
- **At least 200 phone book spaces** (except the LG, which has about 100).
- **At least eight speed-dial spaces** (most have significantly more).

- **Keypad locking** (except the **SAMSUNG A561**, which has a lid that protects the keypad).
- **SMS:** Allows you to send and receive short text messages to any SMS-enabled mobile phone in Australia (but, unlike with GSM, not to an overseas phone).
- **Connection for an external antenna/car kit**, which can vastly improve coverage in weak signal areas.
- **Web browser/WAP:** Allows you to access web-like applications available over the mobile network (for example, information on weather, sports results or the sharemarket). The **KYOCERA 1135** and LG don't have this function.
- **Computer connection:** Allows you to connect your mobile to a computer, and send and receive email and faxes via the computer's modem — handy when you're running a laptop on batteries, for example. The **KYOCERA 1135** and LG don't have this function.
- **Alarm.**
- **Li-ion or Li-polymer battery.**
- **Extendable antenna.**
- **Plug-in charger.**
- **Calculator** (except the LG).

of the somewhat fiddly (at least until you're used to it) joystick-style menu navigation key on the **SONY ERICSSON**.

■ **Portability:** The tested models are about 11–14 cm long, and the weight range is around 80–130 grams. That's a bit heavier and bulkier than latest-generation GSM models, many of which weigh less than 90 grams and are less than 11 cm long (see CHOICE, July 2003). And all except the **NOKIA** and **SONY ERICSSON** have a prominently protruding antenna, which isn't as neat as the internal antenna found on most GSM phones. The antenna arms on the **NOKIA** and **SONY ERICSSON** don't add much to the phones' dimensions.

If small size is important to you, make sure the keys on the phone you want are still large enough for you to operate comfortably.

■ All the models survived our fairly tough **durability** tests without permanent damage, although during the drop test the battery cover on some models came off, the battery got detached, or the lid opened. The heat and humidity test didn't bother any of the phones.

WHAT TO BUY

KYOCERA 1135	\$349
KYOCERA 2235	\$499
LG Mini DM150	\$310
NOKIA 6385	\$549
SAMSUNG SCH-A561	\$979
SAMSUNG SCH-N181	\$349

The two **KYOCERA** models were clearly the best in our sensitivity test, which makes them the ones to choose if you use your mobile a lot in areas with a weak signal. The 2235 has more features and functions than the 1135.

If a particularly long battery life is important for you, the LG's lasted much longer than the other models in our test.

The other three are solid all-round performers.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The **SONY ERICSSON** scored lowest for sensitivity, was the most difficult to use and one of the heavier and bulkier models in the test.

PHONE RECYCLING

If you want to get rid of your old phone, battery or accessories, don't throw them in the bin. Look for a retail outlet showing the symbol below. There you can return these items free of charge, ensuring that toxic and reusable parts are recovered.



PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Sensitivity score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Sound quality score (%)	5 Battery score (%)	6 Durability score (%)	7 Portability score (%)	8 Time in use (mins)	Charge time (mins)
KYOCERA 1135	77	81	83	65	72	100	67	44	240
KYOCERA 2235 (A)	77	86	83	65	68	90	65	39	175
LG Mini DM150 (A)	74	57	76	70	86	100	77	50	150
NOKIA 6385	74	63	80	70	82	90	70	43	90
SAMSUNG SCH-A561	73	60	84	70	70	90	77	39	130
SAMSUNG SCH-N181	73	59	80	65	78	90	85	43	145
SONY ERICSSON T60c (A)	67	54	72	65	70	100	63	38	150

PROFILES

All the tested models are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August 2003.

KYOCERA 1135

Price: \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Very good sensitivity.
- Good battery life.
- No problems in our durability tests.

BAD POINTS

- Longest battery charging time.
- Comparatively, not many features and functions (for example, no WAP web browser and no computer connection).

KYOCERA 2235

Price: \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Best sensitivity.

BAD POINTS

- Fairly long battery charging time.

LG MINI DM150

Price: \$310

GOOD POINTS

- Longest battery life.
- Equal-best sound quality.
- No problems in our durability tests.

BAD POINTS

- Not as sensitive as the top models.
- Comparatively, not many features and functions (for example, no WAP web browser and no computer connection).



NOKIA 6385

Price: \$549

GOOD POINTS

- Good battery life.
- Equal-best sound quality.
- Shortest battery charging time.

BAD POINTS

- Not as sensitive as the top models.

SAMSUNG SCH-A561

Price: \$979

GOOD POINTS

- Equal-best sound quality.
- Colour display.
- Comes with second battery and hands-free set.

BAD POINTS

- Not as sensitive as the top models.

SAMSUNG SCH-N181

Price: \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Good battery life.
- Smallest and lightest phone in the test.
- Comes with hands-free set.

BAD POINTS

- Not as sensitive as the top models.

SONY ERICSSON T60c

Price: \$560

GOOD POINTS

- No problems in our durability tests.

BAD POINTS

- Not as sensitive as the top models.
- Not as easy to use as the others.
- Fatter and wider than the others in the test, and one of the heaviest.

MORE INFO

- Optus: www.optus.com.au.
- Orange: www.orange.net.au.
- Telstra: www.telstra.com.au.
- Vodafone: www.vodafone.com.au.

FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS						
Price calling	Voice recording	Polyphonic ring tones	Colour display	Hands-free	Second battery	Calendar / scheduler	10 Claimed SAR (W / kg)	Weight (g)*	Dimensions (L x W x D, mm)*	Origin	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
							1.4	120	139 x 49 x 23	USA	1	Kyocera	349
	✓						1.4	128	139 x 49 x 23	USA	1	Kyocera	499
							<1.6 (C)	99	135 x 45 x 21	Korea	1	LG Electronics	310
	✓					✓	1.17	128	129 x 47 x 23	Korea	1	Nokia	549
	✓		✓	✓ (B)	✓ (B)	✓	<1.6 (C)	99	112 x 50 x 23	Korea	1	Samsung	979
		✓		✓ (B)		✓	<1.6 (C)	82	121 x 44 x 20	Korea	1	Samsung	349
	✓					✓	1.41	124	121 x 55 x 25	Malaysia	1	Sony Ericsson	560

* Weight including battery; dimensions with the phone closed where applicable.

** Recommended retail price, according to manufacturers in August 2003.

(A) According to the manufacturer, this model has been discontinued, but some stock may still be available in Telstra shops.

(B) Check when you buy that these phones are still supplied with a hands-free kit and spare battery.

(C) While the manufacturer doesn't quote a more precise figure than this, it does comply with requirements.

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on a combination of the following scores:

- Sensitivity: 25%.
- Ease of use: 25%.
- Sound quality: 15%.
- Battery: 20%.
- Durability: 5%.
- Portability: 10%.

2 Sensitivity score

We used the phones in a railway tunnel to simulate an area with poor network coverage. Reception was good outside the tunnel, but became worse the further we walked into it.

We assessed the maximum distance from the entrance at which the phone was still able to maintain a connection established outside the tunnel.

We also looked at the maximum distance from the entrance at which the phone was still able to make a new connection. This distance is slightly shorter than the one above for all the models, so we didn't score it separately.

3 Ease of use score

A user panel assessed the following:

- Instruction manuals (for example, presence of a glossary and troubleshooting guide, clarity of instructions).
- Daily use (such as storing and retrieving a number).
- Ergonomic aspects (layout and size of keys, intuitiveness of the menu, etc).
- Typing and sending SMS.

4 Sound quality score

A user panel assessed the phones' sound quality for both incoming and outgoing calls, with and without background noise.

5 Battery score

This score is mainly based on the time in use (see note 8), but we also considered the battery's charging time.

6 Durability score

We dropped the phones from a height of 80 cm onto a hard surface (eight times on each of their six sides – front, back, top, bottom, left, right), and assessed them for any physical and functional damage.

We also stored the phones at hot and humid conditions (around 40°C and 80% humidity) for 72 hours, and checked them for functional damage after each 24 hours.

We then stored them at normal room conditions for three days, and checked whether they'd recovered from any functional damage they sustained during the damp storage.

7 Portability score

An assessment of the phones' weight and size.

8 Time in use

We used the phones in the following usage cycle: for eight hours per day, we made one four-minute call per hour, and left the phones on standby between calls. We switched them off for the remaining 16 hours. The number in the table is the number of calls we could make with the phones in this cycle. This assessment is more realistic than the 'maximum straight talk time' that's often quoted.

9 Features

See *What to look for*, page 41, for an explanation of these.

10 Claimed SAR

All the tested phones meet the Australian safety limit for their SAR (specific absorption rate), and according to the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) should be considered equally safe. (The SAR is the amount of radio-frequency energy absorbed by the body when you're using the phone.)

However, if you're still concerned you can pick a model with a lower SAR. The number in the table is the SAR claimed by manufacturers and it's worst-case, as it's based on the phone working at maximum power. For more information, check www.amta.org.au/sar.



Samsung SCH-A561

Samsung SCH-N181

PHOTOS: ANTHONY JAMES

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank the Zig-Zag Railway in Lithgow, NSW, for its valuable help with our sensitivity test.



Fully featured FRIDGES

The trade-off: features like
water and ice dispensers
vs space.

PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWYERS

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **On test:** Four side-by-side fridges in the 590–650 L size range (the small end of the side-by-side market).

■ **Choosing a model with a water and ice dispenser** means losing around 30% of your freezer space and extra running costs.

■ **While energy costs** are often comparable to regular large-size fridges, installation and ongoing maintenance costs can add substantially to the price.

The American penchant for big fridges has well and truly taken off here, with more and more Australian families opting for side-by-side fridge/freezers — it's the fastest-growing segment in the market. It's not only their larger size but features such as water and ice dispensers that make them attractive.

The good news is they're becoming increasingly energy-efficient. In fact, the models we tested (average 620 L) used a little less energy than the 'extra-large' (average 545 L) conventional fridges we reported on earlier this year.

However, side-by-sides won't suit everyone. For one, you need lots of space — you can't put them in a corner, because the doors need to open more than 90 degrees for you to remove the shelves and sometimes even to access the freezer contents easily. And you might have trouble getting one through the door — check it will fit before you buy.

Side-by-sides tend to struggle more with temperature uniformity within their compartments and temperature fluctuations compared to conventional models, due to their tall, narrow compartments. There are often some areas at the very top or the top door shelf where the temperature's more likely to vary from that in

the rest of compartment. As for the freezer, we'd recommend you store more sensitive foods, like ice cream or peas, in the middle or bottom of the compartment.

A QUESTION OF SPACE

The space taken up by the icemaker is ignored in the manufacturer's specified volume for the freezer — it could mean you lose as much as 30%. And not all freezers are wide enough to fit large items (like pizza boxes or frozen pastry) lying down — the WHIRLPOOL in this test is a case in point.

Finally, there are costs for installing plumbing for water dispenser/icemaker models, and there are likely to be ongoing costs for replacing filters and repairs — our sister organisation in the US found side-by-sides with ice and water dispensers were around twice as likely to need repairs as fridges without.

WHAT TO BUY

WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW

\$4800*

* Although this is the manufacturer's quoted recommended retail price, they also told us you'll find it on sale for less.

Profiles

All four tested models are profiled. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in August/September 2003.

WHIRLPOOL GOLD 6GD22DCXHW

Price: \$4800

Scored best overall in this test, with no notable shortcomings in temperature performance. Storage in the fresh-food compartment is versatile, with glass shelves that can be placed in many positions and slide out a good distance. However, the freezer is narrow (25 cm) and may not fit some items like pizza boxes or frozen pastry horizontally. The icemaker is easily the fastest of those tested and holds by far the most, but the dispenser is a little awkward to use and clean. The temperature controls are a little difficult to manipulate.

AMANA XRSS267BW

Price: \$6799

The best for ease of use, its overall score was let down because it took almost twice as long as the best fridge to cool a large load of warm drink cans. There are also moderate temperature fluctuations and it may tend to freeze food in the fresh-food compartment in winter unless the controls are adjusted.

LG PREMIUM EZ DIGITAL GR-L207WV

Price: \$3100

Very good energy efficiency and fresh-food cooling, and it handles ambient temperature change well. Its electronic controls are easy to use but have large steps, which limit the number of desirable temperature choices. In parts of the freezer it has large temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts, and there's also some temperature variation throughout this compartment.

SAMSUNG COOL N' COOL SRS614DW

Price: \$2999

The best energy efficiency in the test — and the highest energy score we've ever given. It has electronic temperature management with very easy-to-use pushbutton controls that show the temperatures of the compartments, but don't allow fine temperature adjustment. It has two crispers and a novel two-evaporator design that provides a more humid fresh-food compartment. However, it didn't score very well overall because it has very large temperature fluctuations that are likely to affect some foods, and it doesn't handle ambient temperature change well.



CHOOSING A FRIDGE?

To find the best model(s) for your particular needs, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Nov 03 under 'Fridges' in the index, and you'll have access to our interactive compare-a-product tool. Just type in your preferences and it'll find models to match.



For people with a disability

■ People with poor vision need good lighting and controls that are easy to read: the **WHIRLPOOL** was best.

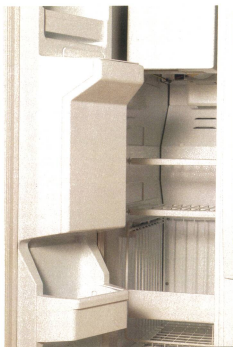
■ The **LG** and **SAMSUNG** have door alarms, which could be useful for people with poor vision or cognitive impairment.

■ If you have a bad back, side-by-sides make it possible to have most items at an acceptable height. However, all models have freezer baskets and crispers down low, so you'll have to bend.

■ The **WHIRLPOOL** has very simple conventional controls — electronic controls may be a confusing new concept for some people.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Temperature performance score (%)	2 Energy efficiency score (%)	Crisper freshness score (%)	Cooling score (%)	Cooling time (hr:min)	2 Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	3 1 run cost
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6D22DCKHW	76	70	76	81	89	66	4:31	790 / 811	107
AMANA XR55267BW (A)	70	77	68	81	85	35	6:24	835 / 812	107
LG Premium Ez Digital GR-L207WW	67	66	52	85	76	82	3:17	710 / 737	92
SAMSUNG Cool n' Cool SR5614DW (B)	67	70	47	92	78	77	3:46	634 / 658	82



The ice-maker and water dispenser take up a lot of freezer space — see right.

What to look for

- For many people the in-door ice and water dispensers will be a plus. They usually need to be connected to a tap — important to consider before installing or moving your fridge. Also, as noted earlier, they can take up almost 30% of your freezer space (see left).
- If you think you'll use a lot of ice (or have lots of parties) look for one with good icemaking and storage capacity. The models in our test made 1–2 kg of ice per day, with storage ranging from 1.5 kg to 7 kg (see the table for details).
- Side-by-side compartments tend to be narrow and deep (see the photo below). This can make them difficult to reach into, and can also restrict storage options — slide-out shelves can help. On the other hand, the narrow doors can be less intrusive into passage space in the kitchen when open.
- A fridge needs at least a few centimetres of air space around it. Measure your available space, and brochures in the shop or the fridge's manual will tell you how much space



You can't lay a frozen pizza flat in the Whirlpool's narrow freezer compartment.

- the fridge needs. And check that it can fit through your home's doorways before you buy.
- Rollers are useful for moving — when cleaning behind the fridge, for example. Four rollers are better than two, provided they have brakes to secure the fridge in place.
- There should also be height-adjustable feet (or rollers) for levelling the fridge. Some side-by-side cabinets can twist unless there's careful height adjustment at various points when the fridge is installed.
- Some fridges (the **LG** and **SAMSUNG** in this test) have a warning beep if you leave the door open too long.
- Some electronic models (including the **LG** and **SAMSUNG** in this test) allow you to set the temperature in °C, which makes it a lot easier. While the models we tested were reasonably accurate, we'd still recommend you check that your fridge is set correctly with a fridge thermometer.

For more general information on what to look for in a fridge, see our last major fridge article (CHOICE, November 2002) or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Nov 02 under "Fridges" in the index.



4 FEATURES

SPECIFICATIONS

Ice made in 24 hours / ice held (kg)	Chiller	Crisper drawers	Dairy compartment	Shelves etc removable when door open to 90°	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	5 Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	5 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)**	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$) [†]
2.0 / 7.0	✓ (C)	1	✓	No	170 x 84 x 83	644	419	225	2 / 5	USA	Whirlpool	4800 (F)
1.0 / 3.5	✓ (C)	2	✓	No	178 x 91 x 68	626	387	239	5 / 10 (D)	USA	Amana / Kleenmaid	6799 (G)
1.0 / 3.0	✓ (C)	1	✓	No	175 x 90 x 73	594	369	225	2 / 5 (E)	Korea	LG	3100
1.0 / 1.5	✓	2	✓	No	170 x 92 x 72	614	387	227	2 / 5	Korea	Samsung	2999

* Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.

** Basic/sealed system warranty; includes parts and labour unless otherwise noted. Sealed system includes the compressor, coils and connecting pipes, and may also include the refrigerant/gas. Some manufacturers offer additional benefits, and/or conditions may apply — check with your retailer.

† Prices are recommended retail as supplied by manufacturers in August/September 2003.

(A) The XRS267BB is technically similar but has a black finish; recommended retail price is \$6799.

(B) The SRS614DP is technically similar but has a pewter finish; recommended retail price is \$3299.

(C) With temperature control.

(D) Parts only after the first five years on the sealed system.

(E) Parts only.

(F) Although the manufacturer quoted this as the recommended retail price, they also say you can find this model in stores for less.

(G) Includes delivery, installation and removing your old fridge.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked over 42,000 subscribers whether their fridge had needed repair in the previous 12 months. There wasn't much difference between brands, and fridges are generally reliable appliances — only 10% overall had needed repair.

The graph only shows the results for brands for which we received sufficient replies — we don't have reliability data for LG. The results include all types of fridge, not just side-by-sides. Differences of more than 7% are meaningful and the number in brackets tells you how many readers reported on the brand. These figures are unlikely to include many with ice/water dispensers.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

Average for all fridges	90
Sharp (677)	95
Samsung (174)	92
Whirlpool (669)	92
Fisher & Paykel (5136)	90
Kelvinator (2738)	90
Westinghouse (5880)	90
GE (666)	87
Amana/Kleenmaid (323)	85

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%.
- Temperature performance: 40%.
- Energy efficiency: 20%.
- Crisper freshness: 8%.
- Cooling: 12%.

For more information on what these tests include, see the last major test report in CHOICE, November 2002, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Nov 02 under 'Fridges' in the index.

2 Energy efficiency score / claimed vs measured energy use

Energy consumption is measured with the icemaker off, as per the standard. Icemaking will use a little extra energy, and if you make a lot of ice you can expect a slight increase in energy consumption and running costs.

3 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 12.5 cents per kWh. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should expect your fridge to last at least this long. (Also see note 2.)

4 Features

See *What to look for*, far left, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au (see note 1) for more general info on features.

5 Claimed volumes

The usable freezer volume is approximately 30% less than claimed, due to space taken by the icemaker, so the claimed total volume is overstated too.



GREAT IDEA, BUT ...

The AMANA has a can dispenser — a wire under-shelf rack partitioned into three rows. The idea is you take one of the front cans and the rest roll forward. The trouble is, it's designed for American cans (which are approximately 340 mL), and our 375 mL cans don't fit! You might be able to use it for other things, and instead stick to drinking the ice water — just think how healthy you'll feel.

recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Charkas Middle East Foods has recalled **Al-Rabih tahineh**, 1000 g, best before 10.1.05, sold in Victoria. It comes in a round white plastic tub with blue writing and a green screw-top lid and carry handle, and is imported from Lebanon.

The problem: It contains salmonella, a food poisoning bacteria that can cause serious illness, and in extreme cases death.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (03) 9383 4487.

FOOD: Logan Farm has recalled **Logan Farm Spinach Portions**, chopped leaf style, 500 g plastic bag, best-before dates of March 2005, April 2005, May 2005 and June 2005.

The problem: The product may contain small thistles.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 651 276 for further information.

FOOD: The Natural Ice Cream Company has recalled **Dairy-Free Fruccio Ice confection**: 1 L, all flavours; 5 L, Dutch chocolate; and 110 mL Fruccio vanilla cups, all best-before dates.

The problem: The product contains undeclared milk protein.

What to do: Don't eat it if you have a milk protein allergy or intolerance. Call 1800 625 612 to arrange a refund. The product can be eaten safely by those without such an allergy or intolerance.

FOOD: Players Biscuits has recalled **Black & Gold and Homebrand dark cooking compound chocolate**, 375 g. The Black & Gold chocolate has best-before dates of 22 Aug 04, 25 Aug 04, 26 Aug 04 and 28 Aug 04, and was distributed in the ACT, NSW, NT, Queensland, SA, Tasmania and Victoria. The Homebrand chocolate has best-before dates of 26 Aug 04, 27 Aug 04 and 28 Aug 04, and was distributed in the ACT, NSW, NT, Queensland, SA and WA. Both were distributed through Woolworths and Metcash (IGA).

The problem: It may contain small metal fragments.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 111 013 or write to Reply Paid 74533, Wetherill Park NSW 1851.

FOOD: Manassen Foods Australia has recalled **Trident Oriental Favourites, Pad Thai Noodles**, 300 g flow-wrap packet, best-before dates 01-01-2005 to 20-06-2005, and imported from Thailand.

The problem: The product labelling doesn't include a warning that the soy sauce sachet contains gluten, and could pose a health risk to those with coeliac disease or gluten intolerance. **What to do:** Don't eat the product if you have coeliac disease or gluten intolerance. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (03) 9577 5900 for more information.

FOOD: Foodland has recalled **Signature Range Apple & Cinnamon Double Ups**, 240 g; **Strawberry & Blueberry Double Ups**, 240 g; **Blueberry Fruit Cereal Bars**, 240 g; **Strawberry Fruit Cereal Bars**, 240 g; **Mixed Berry Fruit Cereal Bars**, 240 g; and **Apricot Fruit Cereal Bar**, 300 g; all best-before dates, sold in Queensland and WA.

The problem: The products contain undeclared soy protein. **What to do:** Don't eat them if you have an allergy or intolerance to soy protein. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 880 078 for more information.

COUGH MEDICINE: Pfizer Consumer Healthcare has recalled **Benadryl for the Family, Dry Cough and Nasal Congestion Liquid**, batch number 6060, expiry date EXP OCT2005, AUST R 77013.

The problem: The product has been found to contain a low concentration of one of the active ingredients, dextromethorphan hydrobromide. **What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 648 975 for more information.

TOY ACTION FIGURE: Mattel has recalled **Max Steel Crossbow**

Commander action figure, sold from February 2002 for about \$19.95. It's an action figure that comes with a crossbow as an accessory. The crossbow consists of a purple and grey N-TEK crossbow and brown arrow. The model number of the action figure is 54471.

The problem: The crossbow has failed safety tests for projectile toys.

What to do: Stop using the crossbow and store it out of reach of children. Call 1800 674 753, Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm EST, for more information and details on how to obtain a refund or replacement.

COMPUTER MONITOR: IBM Australia has recalled **15 inch monitors**

(further to the recall published in CHOICE, June 2003). The models affected are G51 model numbers 6541-02N, 6541-02E and 6541-02S, manufactured between June 1997 and September 1998, which is shown on the rear label; and G51 model numbers 6541-QQN, 6541-QQE and 6541-QQS, some serial numbers (call to check which ones).

The problem: An internal electrical component can overheat and smoke, posing a potential fire hazard.

What to do: Stop using the affected models and call 1800 766 766, Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm EST.

HAIR STRAIGHTENER: Remington has recalled **Super Smooth Professional Straightener**, model number S3000, sold from August 2002.

The problem: There may be a fault in the cord set that could cause the power cable to fracture, potentially exposing live 240 V wiring.

What to do: Stop using it. Call 1800 623 118, Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 4.30 pm EST, to arrange for a replacement with an upgraded model, or send the product with your name and address to free post Reply Paid 78281, Remington S3000 Recall, 800 Wellington Road, Rowville 3178.

CHILDREN'S SANDALS: Bonds Industries has recalled **Bonds Infants Girls Flower Sandals**, sold in sizes 1-4 UK. They've been available

since August 15, 2003, at Best & Less stores, in white, petal and buttercup colours, and feature three daisy trims across the front of the sandal.

The problem: The daisies could detach and pose a choking hazard to a young child.

What to do: To obtain a refund, return the shoes via free post to: Attention Leanne Mifsud, Bonds Industries Pty Ltd, 190 Dunsmore St, Reply Paid 74872, Wentworthville 2145. For more information call 1800 806 906, Monday to Friday, between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm EST.

HEATED MIRROR: Kohler has recalled **Tesero heated mirrors**, product codes 11241A and 84125000, sold under both the Kohler and Englefield brands through plumbing and building retailers since 1998.

The problem: The insulation of the heater units fixed to the rear of the mirror doesn't meet the requirements of the Australasian Electrical Safety Standards, and may break down over a long period, resulting in a possible electric shock if the rear of the mirror is touched.

What to do: Stop using the mirror. Call 1300 362 284, Monday to Friday, 8 am to 7 pm EST, to arrange for the installation of a replacement heater.

AQUARIUM LIGHTING: AVK Imports has recalled **Pro-Aqua and Aqua-Pro aquarium fluorescent lighting units**, model numbers AHRC-1020, AHRC-1025, AHRC-1032, AHRC-1040, AHRC-1200, AHRC-1500 and AHRC-1800, sold between February and June 2003 at aquarium outlets in Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

The problem: The fluorescent lamp ballasts fitted to these units have been found to overheat, which could result in a breakdown of the insulation and lead to an electric shock hazard.

What to do: Stop using the lighting hood portion of the units and return it to the place of purchase for repair or replacement. Call (07) 5520 1911 for more information.

CAR: Jaguar Australia has recalled **Jaguar XJ vehicles**, 1998 to 2000, within the VIN range 812256 to F15803.

The problem: The power steering rack return pipe may arc to the alternator, possibly perforating the pipe and in extreme cases causing a fire.

What to do: Contact your nearest Jaguar dealer to arrange for repair.

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FINANCE AND PROPERTY: Manager Alan Johnston. **Accounts** Jeannette Dwyer, Kang Zhu Ge, Sera Unluolalo. **Administration** Jeannette Porter. **Library** Jane Wholahan. **Records management** Shirley Collins.

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Marketing statistics by GfK Marketing Services. **Financial information** supplied by Canxex. **Services information** supplied by ASSIRT.

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Telephone (02) 9577 3333. **Fax** (02) 9577 3377. **Subscription enquiries** (02) 9577 3399.

CHOICE Consumer Services (02) 9577 3399. email ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

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* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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 travel Mar, Apr*, Nov

Internet dial-up problems, fixing Aug
 Investment, ethical Oct
 Irons, steam, expensive Jan/Feb

Jeans, ethical manufacture Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*

Knee-highs Sep

Labelling, food, percentage Aug
 Laser printers, b&w Apr
 Laundry detergents Jan/Feb
 Layback strollers Aug
 LG Solardom Nov

Manufacture, ethical Jan/Feb, Jun, Oct*
 Microfibre cleaning cloths Aug
 Mobile phones
 CDMA Nov
 GSM Jul
 Moisturisers Apr
 Money — see Banks, Financial
 Monitors, computer, buying guide May

Mortgages, packaged Mar

Oven
 Brandt, steam Nov
 cleaners May
 LG Solardom Nov

Paint, exterior Dec
 Peanut butter Jun
 Percentage labelling of food Aug
 Pesticide residues in tea May
 Pesticides, garden sprays Dec, Jan/Feb*, Apr*, May*
 Petrol, ethanol in May, Aug*
 Phones, cordless Apr
 Phones, mobile — see Mobile phones

Pizza Oct
 Portable cots May
 Potato chips, wedges, shapes Sep
 Premium beer Sep
 Printers, laser, b&w Apr
 Pumpkin soup Jul

Red wine blends Dec
 Refrigerators — see Fridges
 Retirement villages Sep
 Rubber gloves Dec

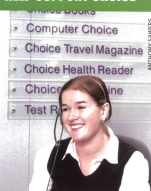
Selling your home, DIY Nov
 Sewing machines Dec
 Sheets Jun
 Smoked salmon Dec
 Soft-serve 'ice cream' Dec
 Solardom oven (LG) Nov
 Soup, pumpkin Jul
 Soy Jun
 Soy milk maker Jun
 Steam oven (Brandt) Nov
 Strollers, layback Aug
 Sunglasses Aug, Oct*
 Sunscreens Nov
 Supermarket prices Jul

Tea, pesticide residues in May
 Telephones, — see Phones
 Television
 51 cm Apr, Aug*
 68 cm Nov
 Toothbrushes Sep
 Travel insurance Mar, Apr*, Nov
 Tyres May

Vacuum cleaners, cheap Jul
 Video cameras, digital Jan/Feb, Apr*

Washing machines Mar, Sep, Nov*
 Washing-up liquids Apr
 Water filters Mar, May*
 Water heaters
 choosing Oct
 gas instantaneous Oct
 Wine, red blends Dec
 Wrinkle creams Mar

HELP SUPPORT CHOICE



The Australian Consumers' Association is completely funded by our subscribers, book purchasers and other customers. We don't receive ongoing funding from government or any commercial source. Your donation or request to ACA will assist our work of informing and representing Australian consumers. To make a contribution or receive an information pack, call Lizzie (above) on 1800 069 552 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

Women's single sport socks

\$2 or \$4 pair



SOCKS FOR THE SINGLE-FOOTED

Don't you hate how you always have to buy two socks when you only need one? Then you have this extra sock just hanging around, and you can't do anything with it except wear it when the first one's in the wash ...

Nope, we can't think of any reason why buying only one sock is better than buying two — can you? The funniest not-too-long answer wins a copy of the *Hard Word* book. See below for contact details.



BLACK & GOLD

ORANGE MARMALADE

	AVG QUANTITY PER SERVING	AVG QUANTITY PER 100g
ENERGY	218kJ	1090kJ
FAT TOTAL	less than 1g	less than 1g
-SATURATED	less than 1g	less than 1g
TOTAL CARBOHYDRATES	13.0g	65.0g
-SUGARS	13.0g	65.0g
SODIUM	0mg	0mg

INGREDIENTS:
SUGAR, ORANGES (35%), WATER, PECTIN, LACTIC ACID.

SERVING SIZE 10g	PER SERVING 10g	PER 100g
ENERGY	207kJ (49 Cal)	1036kJ (250 Cal)
PROTEIN	LESS THAN 1g	LESS THAN 1g
FAT TOTAL	LESS THAN 1g	LESS THAN 1g
-SATURATED	LESS THAN 1g	LESS THAN 1g
CARBOHYDRATE		
-total	12.4g	65.0g
-sugars	12.4g	65.0g
SODIUM	0mg	0mg
POTASSIUM	0mg	0mg

INGREDIENTS: ORANGES (35%), SUGAR, GLUCOSE SYRUP, WATER, GELLING AGENT (PECTIN), FOOD ACID (LACTIC ACID).



Jam that sugar in any way you can

It's likely these supermarket-brand marmalades are the same: both have the same nutrition profile, have 35% oranges, 65% sugar and are made in Denmark. What's interesting, though, if you read the ingredients, is that the **FARMLAND** product lists oranges first, while the **BLACK & GOLD** lists sugar.

On closer examination, **FARMLAND** has split total sugar into 'sugar' and 'glucose syrup'. Given that Australian labelling laws say the ingredients have to be listed in order of quantity, this presumably means they're each less than 35% (although at a total of 65% between them, they must be cutting it fine). But can they really claim oranges are the primary ingredient?



"REAM/RIM/ NOUN A STANDARD QUANTITY AMONG PAPER DEALERS MEANING 20 QUIRES OR 500 SHEETS."

At least that's what the Macquarie Dictionary says. "What next?" asks our reader, "12-egg and six-egg dozens?"

Errors and Omissions Expected (E&OE)

Brochure prepared by Hitachi Power Tools Australia Pty Ltd

Can't say we weren't warned!

I'll have 12 errors and a box of omissions when they arrive, thanks!



Supercraft

GROUT REMOVER

Change the wording as follows -

The Supercraft Grout Remover is an ideal tool for the removal of grout from between existing wall or floor tiles.

INSERT WITTY HEADING

Write something hilarious here.

22 \$318,470

income
ver 10
viding
teroes.
dvice.



Insert name

.com.au/stephen.watson



HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The *Hard Word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to R Gordon, the Grenvilles, G Dean, S Brain, D Corbett, D&P Whiteside and T Wallen for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming. The *Hard Word* book winner for this month's best entry is S Brain.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.